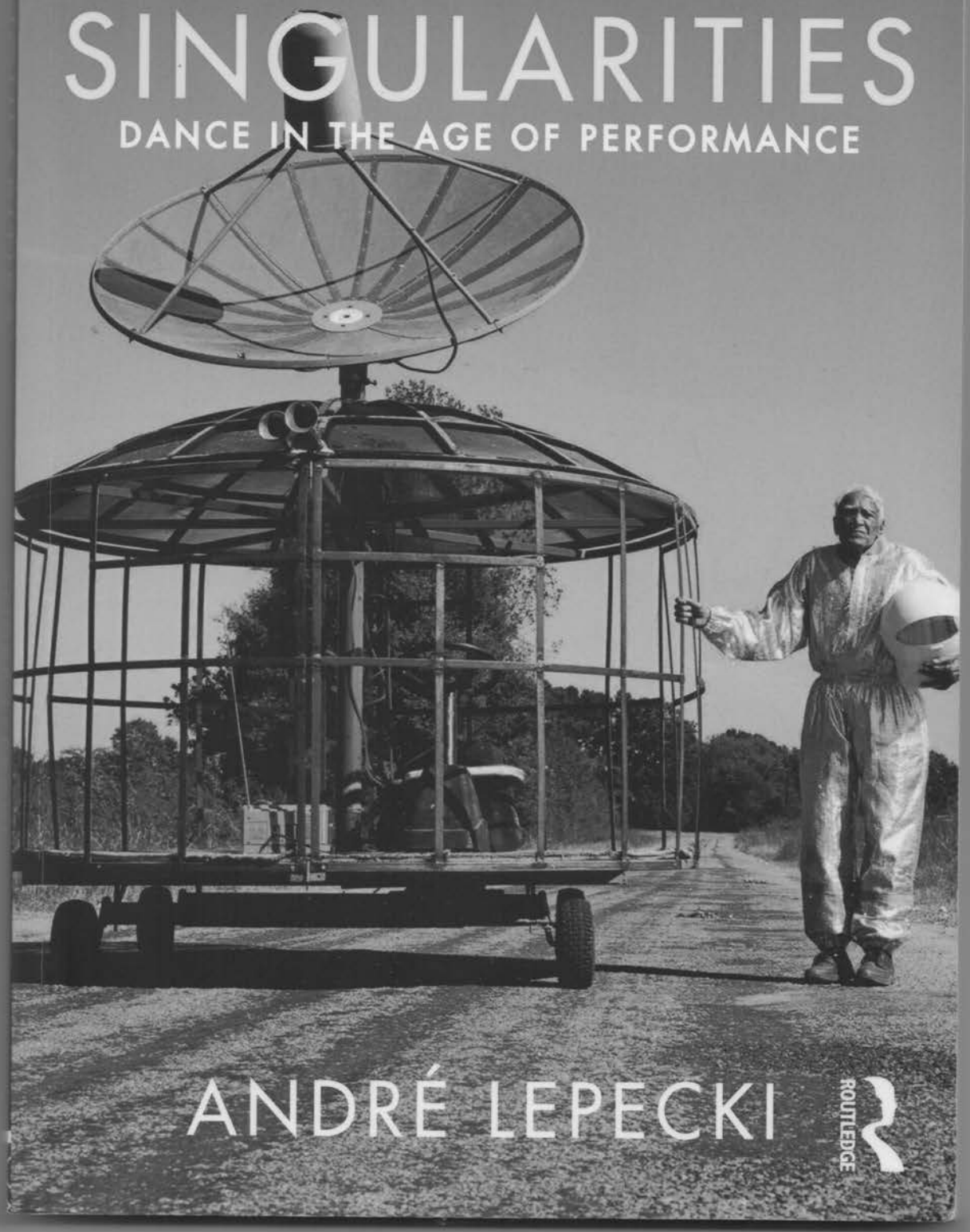
SINGULARITIES

DANCE IN THE AGE OF PERFORMANCE



ANDRÉ LEPECKI

ROUTLEDGE

Singularities

How does the production of performance engage with the fundamental issues of our advanced neo-capitalist age?

André Lepecki surveys a decade of experimental choreography to uncover the dual meaning of 'performance' in the twenty-first century: not just an aesthetic category, but a mode of political power. He demonstrates the enduring ability of performance to critique and subvert this power, examining this relationship through five 'singularities' in contemporary dance: thingness, animality, persistence, darkness, and solidity.

Exploring the works of Mette Ingvartsen, Yvonne Rainer, Ralph Lemon, Jérôme Bel and others, Lepecki uses his concept of 'singularity'—the resistance of categorization and aesthetic identification—to examine the function of dance and performance in political and artistic debate.

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Introduction

Dance and the age of neoliberal performance

On the evening of November 18, 2015, just five days after the series of coordinated terrorist attacks in the city of Paris and its northern suburb of Saint-Denis that targeted cafés, clubs, and a soccer stadium left several dozen dead and hundreds wounded, and with the entire country under a State of Emergency while a massive manhunt stretching into Belgium and Germany was ongoing, the audience gathering at the Centre Georges Pompidou to attend the French premiere of Danish choreographer Mette Ingvartsen's group piece *7 pleasures* could be found reading the following text, printed in English and French, and distributed in photocopied A4 sheets of paper:

> Paris, November 18th 2015
>
> Dear Public,
>
> As the author of *7 pleasures* and on behalf of the dancers performing this evening, I feel the need to share some thoughts about playing here tonight. As a group of dancers we have been discussing whether or not to perform in these extreme circumstances of crisis, after the events that happened on Friday in this city and that are still ongoing. The main reason for continuing to play, besides insisting on not being paralyzed by what has happened, is to allow the theater to take up its social function of being a place to gather. Dance and performance are live art disciplines. And as dancers and performers we find a difficulty in separating our performing inside the theater from what is going on in the outside world. We would like to acknowledge that in this particular situation.
>
> Tonight we will move and dance with all the thoughts and feelings that we have passed through in the previous days and we would like to invite you to do the same.
>
> Thank you for being here with us for this performance.
>
> Mette Ingvartsen and all the team of *7 pleasures*

Almost half a century after Martha Graham had confined "a dancer's world" to the isolated space of the studio (in the film *A Dancer's World*, 1957) Ingvartsen

and the *7 pleasure* dancers made clear what it means to be a dancer in today's world: to insist on the social function of the theater as a gathering place; and to acknowledge that a dancer's labor is inseparable from the conditions of the world, and therefore, to acknowledge that the affective charge of each performance cannot but resonate with, and be informed by, such conditions, which only the fiction of representation could turn into something "external." It is not that, in the history of modern and postmodern dance, choreographers had not directly addressed and critiqued social and political conditions of violence and its horrors, as Graham herself had explicitly done in the 1930s with her solo *Lamentations*, or Yvonne Rainer in the late 1960s and early 1970s in several of her performances.[1] But with this note to the audience, what is emphasized is not content but how dancers and audiences all produce, and are produced by, a shared bio- and necropolitical "nervous system" (Taussig 1993: 1–8) that assaults the putative autonomy of choreographic representation at the moment of its performance and informs the very physical and affective conditions of contemporary spectatorship and performing.

So, the question then becomes, for contemporary dance and performance: what are the conditions of the situation we find ourselves in today, in the extremely expanded West and its ever more expanded warzones, making art, choreographing, dancing, writing books, creating work, teaching and learning and gathering and fighting and despairing and studying the situation and then returning for more fighting and more despairing, more working and more art making, and more theory and more love making, and usually more death and more sadness than joy? It is a situation conditioned by a new kind of rationality, a new mode of reasoning, not necessarily the most amenable to those who happen to believe in thinking (thinking as art, thinking as thought, thinking as living), to those who trust the necessary opaqueness and complexity of life, those who believe in the vital importance of not having profit and self-profit as the only goal for life and its arts. It is a situation really hostile to, and impatient with, those who create the non-recognizable and don't care about being recognized; those who cannot or would rather not participate in the generalized gregariousness of compulsive self(ie)-networking; those who do not fuel self(ie)-centered sociability. It is a situation with no space or time for those who insist on keep proposing, on keep gathering for no other purpose than to gather. Political theorists have called the conditions conditioning the situation and its newfound rationality, neoliberalism: "a specific and normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject, 'conduct of conduct,' and scheme of valuation [...] intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government" (Brown 2015: 48–49).

We are, as always, as everyone, everywhere and anytime, being conditioned. However, the rationality that orientates the neoliberal condition of overall conditioning, the (il)logic that makes it all have not only some kind of sense, but that makes the conditions of contemporary conditioning gain real hegemonic sense, real normative sense, real neo-colonialist, neo-racist

sense, that (i)logic is governing conduct as if it were granting liberty. That's how it permeates our actions with renewed intensity. Wendy Brown called the permeation of neoliberalism into the very fibers of our flesh, "stealth revolution." We can call it, more performatively, "body snatching."

In permeating our actions, neoliberal conditioning shows how it has already captured subjectivity. Having captured subjectivity, it permeates the making of art and the making of discourses about art. The conditioning becomes our shared nervous system. Including art's and theory's nervous systems. Through them, we sense and make sense, we enflesh. Bodies fibrillating with and against the rhythms of our era. However, in between systole and diastole, in arrhythmia, we discover the permeability in neoliberalism's permeation of subjectivity. There and then, between beatings, we breathe and take a break, we find vacuoles and gaps, we cut grooves where we run, dance, write, study, make love, live, and permeate back to infiltrate and undo the conditioning.

For a moment, life unconditioned. Or rather: life deconditioned from all that had turned life into a choreography of conformity. For a moment, singularity. Surprisingly we realize that there are actual, real zones of existence that opportunistic neoliberal capitalism really hates, and wants to have nothing to do with them. Strangely strange zones, depopulated from those who want to run things, populated by things that "want to run," as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney say (Harney and Moten 2013: 51). A collective of singularities and events suddenly precipitating improbable encounters against a society of individuals and essences busily arranging ever more dates for ever more self(ie)-networking.

In conditioning both art and the theories that address art, the conditions that make neoliberal capitalism's irrationality rule, that make it present itself and perform as reasonably rational, as reasonably acceptable, as reasonably desirable project for subjectivity, indeed as the only *possible* and reasonable option for life—those conditions of neoliberal performance must be addressed. Hence, I propose the following working premises for addressing what conditions and situates the current relations between art and life, particularly between live performance and life, and most specifically between experimental dance and life.

1) If today, in juridical and diplomatic terms, the political and legal instruments that formerly linked European nation-states with their colonies in the Southern and Eastern parts of the globe are no longer in place, the fact remains that *the modes of relation* between nation States today, and particularly between former colonizing powers and their former colonized territories, are ones where *the primacy of colonialist logic remains hegemonic, dominant.*
2) It is impossible to think about the development of capitalism without thinking about its co-development with colonialism.[2] One rubs the other's back. One is the other's logic in deep correspondence. The

many transformations of capitalism over the past centuries (mercantilist capitalism, industrial capitalism, fordist capitalism, liberal capitalism, neoliberal capitalism) reflect and inflect, at the same time, the many transformations of colonialism.

3) The primary principle and first technology binding capitalism and colonialism was that necropolitical invention, the slave, or "the commodity who speaks" to use Fred Moten's expression (Moten 2003: 5–11).
4) In the joined history of capitalist colonialism, of colonialist capitalism, slavery is not just yet another technique of interpersonal servitude and exploitation (exploitation of labor, of life, of reproductive capacities, of sex, desire, flesh and their motions). It is rather a bio- and necropolitical technology of subjectivation that captures the entire system of conceiving life and its values, thus transforming all value in "abuse value," as Michel Serres suggested (Serres and Schehr 2007: 80).
5) The current metamorphosis of the colonialist-capitalist assemblage of power has received the name "neoliberalism." Contrary to what its ideologues and defenders claim, neoliberal capitalism needs not democracy to exist. As Wendy Brown reminds us, neoliberalism's first steps took place in economic-political experiments in Latin American and African dictatorships during the early 1970s, precisely as ways to defuse decolonizing and anticapitalist becomings, and block them right away, under a new regime of dependency. Think of the "Chicago Boys" implementing this new economic logic during Augusto Pinochet's murderous dictatorial regime in Chile throughout the 1970s. Think of Margaret Thatcher, who as the dictator was being indicted for crimes against humanity, publicly thanked Pinochet for his "help" to the UK and for "*bringing democracy to Chile*."[3] What Thatcher meant, of course, was bringing capitalist conditioning to Chile. Here, the corpses don't really matter. Neoliberal democracy as necropolitics indeed.
6) It is impossible to delink neoliberal political economy from the increased phenomena of endemic warfare in the Middle East and Africa; the rise of concentration camps and "black sites" in the expanded West (camps for migrants, for refugees, for "enemy combatants," for those illegally abducted by democratic State powers); and the assassination of Western citizens by their own governments thanks to executive fiat or secret orders. This endemic logic of always rationalized and reasonably justified brutality for the sake of "security" reminds us (following Paul Gilroy, in his book *Post-colonial Melancholia*) that if the concentration camp, as Giorgio Agamben once posited, is indeed the nomos of neoliberal Western democracy (Agamben 1998: 166–180), then the colony's necropolitics is the legal-racist foundation of the camp (Gilroy 2005: 48–49).
7) The recent arrival of murderous violence under the logic of premodern conflicts (Muslims versus Crusaders, shock of civilizations, etc.) to

capitals and major cities of Europe and North America is only proof of how the situation of neoliberal conditioning conditions what Guattari called "integrated world capitalism" (Guattari and Negri 2010: 48–52) into a generalized state of war.

8) The kinetic interface between colonialism and capitalism emerges in what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have called "logisticality," the management and control over the movement of objects and subjects within the channels of capitalism's kineticism: "Modern logistics is founded with the first great movement of commodities, the ones that could speak. It was founded in the Atlantic slave trade, founded against the Atlantic slave" (Harney and Moten 2013: 92). In this sense, dance and choreography, as knowledge formations on the conditions of mobility, self-mobility, and generalized mobilization, become critical to address and counter the kinetic impetus in neoliberalism.

Given the conditions of the situation, how to dance and make dances and attend to dances in the age of neoliberal performance and rationality? How to write about, how to theorize dance's theories and practices of resistance in and against the age of neoliberal performance? *Singularities: dance in the age of performance* is an attempt to think on those conditions of dancing and writing against (even though, admittedly from within) the conditions of neoliberal conditioning. The book addresses a decade of artistic production in experimental choreography from 2003 to 2014. The book's main purpose, unfolding in five chapters and one afterthought, is to assess the different ways some very specific works in experimental dance performance created by artists working in the US, Brazil, and Europe both express *and* critique the fundamental elements that define the (irrational) rationality sustaining our age of neoliberal, neocolonialist capitalism.

In the following chapters I will discuss solo and group pieces by (in order of appearance in the book) Maria José Arjona (Colombia), Trajal Harrell (US), João Fiadeiro (Portugal), Aitana Cordero (Spain), Mette Edvardsen (Norway), Mette Ingvartsen (Denmark), Marcelo Evelin (Brazil), Manuel Pelmus (Romania), Marcela Levi and Lucía Russo (Brazil/Argentina), Xavier Le Roy (France), Antonia Baehr (Germany), Eiko & Koma (US), Julie Tolentino and Ron Athey (US), Martin Nachbar (Germany), Richard Move (US), Ralph Lemon and Walter Carter (US), and Jérôme Bel (France). As it will become clear, the works in question refuse conformed conducts, recognizable forms, and identifiable performance genres, including recognizably "transgressive" forms (ie., they refuse choreopoliced performances) and, nonheroically, almost modestly, matter of factly propose, instead, unexpected and improbable practices, extemporaneous modes of dissent, and momentary zones of freedom (i.e., they embrace choreopolitical actions).[4] Nevertheless, they all gather and take place under the name of dance.

Crucial to the book's argument is the understanding that corporealities ("the discursive construction of materiality," Povinelli 2011: 108) and

subjectivities (the affective construction of corporealities) are constantly being coproduced in a struggle between the normative power of *individualization* (whose juridical name is "person," see [Esposito 2011: passim]) and the open potentialities of *singularities* (modes of collective *individuation* away from the monadic-juridical form of the person).[5] This struggle expresses how every corporeal/subjective formation performs both dissensual and consensual acts.

I hope it will become increasingly clear in the following pages that the concept that most adequately names the set of dissensual practices of corporeality and subjectivity found in the choreographic works I discuss is the concept of singularity. As John Rajchman once wrote, "we need a new concept of society in which what we have in common are not our individualities but our singularities" (Rajchman in Deleuze and Boyman 2001: 14).

Throughout this book the word "singularity" is used in a very precise way. It is not synonymous to the "unique," to the "particular," to the "singular," and even less to the "individual." Rather, singularity is "irreducible, and therefore, a bearer of strangeness" as philosopher of art Georges Didi-Huberman proposes (2009: 81, translation mine). As essentially coextensive with strangeness, singularities are always producers of "multiplicity," "complexity" (82), "bifurcations" (81), and unanticipated swerves that implicate all the dimensions of the real.

From the point of view of aesthetic theory, the *production of strangeness* (in dance or in art at large) brought about by singularities is a helpful analytical tool in the sense that it replaces the modernist notion that conceives of art as the creation of "the new." Direct consequence of this operation is the debunking of the figure of artist as unique and original source of the new. This replacing immediately prompts another contribution of the concept of singularity to aesthetic theory: it disidentifies works from their authors' "selves." As a concept bound to acts of strangeness, a singularity queerly operates what José Muñoz called, after Judith Butler, "disidentifications" (Munõz 1999; Butler 1993: 4).

By moving away from aesthetic-semiotic policed consensuality, by affirming the singularities they make, the works discussed in the following six chapters disidentify dance, make dance unrecognizable in relation to its expected formations, and therefore make dance truly foreign to itself. Dance's movement of estrangement and derivation, its critical capacity to escape from forms, times, and procedures it is supposed to be confined to and identified with as an aesthetic discipline, is one of the reasons that prompts me to use the concept of singularity to title this book.

Five singularities in contemporary dance

Didi-Huberman's notion of singularity as a complex multiplicity generator of "strangeness" is drawn from Gilles Deleuze's definition of the concept, which is crucial to his entire philosophy of immanence. For Deleuze,

singularities are the actualization of a difference that matters difference in the world: "Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points" (Deleuze 1990: 52).

The performances discussed and analyzed in this book are so many irreducible sensitive points. They activate, each in its own specific way, five particular singularities, five particular problematic fields (a "problematic structure is constituted *positively* by an infinite set of divergent series, which is nonetheless entirely determined by the attractor itself," i.e., determined by the singularity [Smith 2011: 159, emphasis added]), discussed in each chapter in the following order: *thingness*, *darkness*, *animality*, *persistence*, and *solidity*.

The multiple complexity contained and released in and by singularities at the moment of their actualization is what makes a singularity always the expression of an event.[6] This is why those five words, those five singularities brought about and informing so much of recent choreographic imagination, are less bound to signification than to expressing the proper name of the event they precipitate: the *event* of thingness, the *event* of darkness, the *event* of animality, the *event* of persistence, the *event* of solidity. As such, each of the five singularities gathers around itself constellations of several other concepts, movements, gestures, choreographic procedures, corporealities, modes of performing, and regimes of attention. This gathering of the disparate expresses the assembling force of singularities, their intrinsic collective nature, and their proximity to the mode of existence of things, rather than of well-defined objects and their self-present subjects.

Dance, performance, and neoliberal rationality

The past decade witnessed the consolidation and intensification of neoliberal governmentality across the globe. It also witnessed the noticeable and increased presence and importance of dance performances in museums, galleries, and visual arts biennials across the globe. It was also a decade where dance acquired a crucial role in essays and books by philosophers of art as varied as Erin Manning (2009, 2013), Brian Massumi (2002), José Gil (2001, 2001a, 2009), Giorgio Agamben (2004), Jacques Rancière (2013), Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy (2005), or Georges Didi-Huberman (2006). Finally, the past decade also saw dance taking an increased critical function in scholarly publications in performance studies, cultural studies, disability studies, black and critical race studies, queer theory, and in contemporary art history. I believe the presence of dance across these different fields indicates how it has become one of the most relevant critical-aesthetic practices in live art today. My hypothesis in this book is that dance's prominent presence in those different artistic and theoretical arenas is not mere coincidence. Later in this "Introduction" I will

articulate in detail why I believe dance has such privileged critical position of analysis and resistance in regards neoliberal rationality, corporeality, and subjectivity. For now, it is important to emphasize the generalized perception in visual arts curation, in the philosophy of art, and in critical theory and cultural studies that dance has a unique capacity within the arts to address, directly and acutely, the "peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence" of our times: "neoliberal rationality" (Brown 2015: 17). In this sense, dance in the age of performance already expresses its singularity: to generate charged and vital problematic fields on which pressing and urgent political, corporeal, affective, and social problems are made visible and gather—not to find a solution, but to further the movement of problematization.[7]

The paradox of performance

"Performance" does not name solely the advent of a new aesthetic category usually identified with happenings, performance art, body art, actionism, and post-modern dance—all artistic expressions that emerged more or less globally between 1959 and 1979, in parallel with the transition between liberal capitalism and its neoliberal integrated global form. It also expresses *a whole new political condition of power* that is co-extensive, and yet has totally different goals, to the political-aesthetic promises embedded in the artistic practices we usually identify as performance.

Already in 2001, in his book *Perform or Else*, performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie had identified a constitutive "paradox" in the word "performance": it "can be read as both experimentation and normativity" (McKenzie 2001: ix). McKenzie analyzed how the constitutive ambiguity of the word performance had emerged, throughout the twentieth century, in two separate spheres: what he called "organizational performance"—linked to the implementation of "efficiencies" in state, institutional, corporate, and industrial environments; and what he called "cultural performances"—denoting those that "foreground and resist dominant norms of social control" (McKenzie 2001: 9).

A decade and a half after the writing of those words, it has become clear that "cultural performance" has fused with "organizational performance" and that this fusion is central to neoliberal societies, their institutions and corporations. Indeed, performance has become a crucial element of "that cornucopia of techniques of the self which symbiotize aptitude with self-awareness and performance with self-realization (not to mention self-presentation)" (Gordon 1991: 44). Through performance, neoliberalism reifies the very purpose of life as nothing other than the "permanent retraining" (44) for learning how to best be in permanent self-display—an ongoing process where the subject can only find self-realization, emotional self-assurance, and social integration through endless re-presentations of self-performances.

Another unfolding of performance as paradigm in neoliberalism is the notion, that starts to be advanced in the late 1990s and gains traction by the mid 2000s, that "economics is performative" (MacKenzie, Muniesa, Siu 2007). Besides the performativity of economics (economics capacity to theoretically address and effectively create concrete realities and effects in the world thanks to abstract financial instruments), it is also crucial for neoliberal capitalism to plunder and foster the performance of creativity. In a twist further demonstrating the fusion between cultural and organizational performance, neoliberalism demands creativity. However, as Maurizio Lazzarato points out, neoliberal creativity has as its performance model not the artist but the *entrepreneur*, "a figure that neoliberalism wants to extend across the board to everyone, artists included" (Lazzarato 2011:47).

The cooptation of performance, of the performative power of performance (its capacity not only to represent, but to generate effects and matters, and to make world)[8] by economics and political economy through the figure of the entrepreneur (a figure that is a true "vector of subjectification" in neoliberalism, to use an expression by Félix Guattari, 1989: 136) is indeed crucial for understanding how neoliberal ideologies meet "affective capitalism" (Lazzarato 2013).[9]

In the context of ever-expansive cyber-industrial and cyber-stately policing apparatuses in Western democracies—where the unprecedented surveillance of the citizenry, the privatization of cultural activities, the economization of artistic expression, and the movement of sociality as mainly the movement of Self(ie)-images disseminated through controlled and monetized cyber-platforms are the rule—the unruly promises of performance and performativity must be reckoned with by power. Thus, performance and performativity find themselves a primary target for surveillance and for being (ab)used by economic and state power. Faced with this situation, the choreopolitical question becomes: how to act under such predicament and propose something else, a "differential and differentiating process of materializing and mattering, which remains uninsured and unanticipated, persistently and interminably susceptible to the spectral forces of eventness," to quote Athena Athanasiou's definition of the performative (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 140)?[10] Throughout this book, I show how choreographic experimentation offers its provisional answers, its singular problems as well as its performative promises to this pressing question.

Power, self(ie)-performance, and the a-personal dance

Recently, Judith Butler called for thinking "about the relation between biopower and neoliberalism, and to think about both of these in light of new forms of securitarian power" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 169). One of the ways to think about this relation is to consider how in performances of the self in neoliberalism, what Foucault had called "care of the Self" has turned into an ongoing *care of the investment on (the future profitability of)*

my Self(ie). As political theorist Wendy Brown reminds us, neoliberalism fuses securitization with "the 'economization' of heretofore noneconomic spheres and practices" (Brown 2015: 31).

Sociologist and dance scholar Randy Martin states in his book *Financialization of Daily Life*,

> Finance, the management of money's ebbs and flows, is not simply in the service of accessible wealth, but presents itself as a merger of business and life cycles, as a means for the *acquisition of self*. The financialization of daily life [is] also a medium for the expansive movements of body and soul.
>
> (Martin 2002: 3, emphasis added)

Brown concurs, noting more recently that the "economization" (her expression for Martin's "financialization") of life "reaches to practices and crevices of desire heretofore unimaginable" (32). A very important aspect to both Martin's and Brown's analysis is that the intrusion of financialization and economization at the core of desire follows "the specific model [of] *financial* or *investment* capital, and not only productive or entrepreneurial capital" (Brown 33, emphasis added).

At the level of subjectivity, of corporeal performances of relationality, to base one's affective life on the model of financial investment means that every single one of one's actions must be orientated towards profitable future returns, "enhancing the self's future value" (Brown 34). Added value must always recompense one's public options and private affective wagers. But given that it is of the nature of financial investment to be an investment on the very abstraction of capital value, it follows that for neoliberal subjectivity one's gestures, movements, words, daily performances, and corporeal dispositions are all investments on that ultimate abstraction: one's Self. One invests in one's Self as one would invest in a promising stock option. Investing in one's Self means also that the abstract return of profit should benefit no one other than one's self-profitable Self.[11]

For dance, this recrudescence of the Self, of the person, of the individual, through neoliberal self-investment on the Self, what Catherine Chaput has called "neoliberal epideictic" (Chaput 2010: 3), poses tremendous political-aesthetic problems.On one hand, there is the reliance of choreography on the dancer's presence in performance. In the tradition of Western theatrical dance's system of presence, the dancer's presence has been experientially linked to a "powerful narcissistic capacity" of the dancer (Gil 2009: 89), which has been historically linked to the dancer's *person* and to the *epideictic mode* as main structuring vectors of subjectivation. As dance historian Mark Franko remarks in regards Renaissance dance manuals, "The dancer's own person is the ultimate and single object of praise and dispraise in the dance" (Franko 1986: 22). Given the emphasis on self-praise in neoliberal subjectivity, expressed by Self(ie) culture (Lepecki 2015b),

and compulsive social-networking of narcissist self-investment, dance must remain vigilant and critical in regards its foundational emphasis on the person and on the praising of the dancer as one of its main aesthetic traits.

It should be no surprise then, that in several works addressed in this book, we will find choreographers proposing different strategies to disavow the notion of the Self, to get rid of the figure of person, and even, at the limit, completely erase the visible presence of dancers from representation (see Chapters 1 to 3). In a paradoxical rescuing of the force and promise of live performance and of dance, it may sometimes be ethically and politically necessary for a dancer to refuse to give him- or herself to view (see Chapter 2).

In neoliberal self-investment, the refusal of the dancer to make an appearance, and particularly to appear as a subject, or a person, is a quite powerful affirmation. It reminds us vividly that "the person is not to be conceived of as the only form within which life is destined to flow" (Esposito 2011: 140). We can see the choreographic proposition of alternate, apersonal radical assemblages (collective or singular) for life to flow in the works of North American Trajal Harrell (discussed in Chapter 1) and in Brazilian choreographer Marcelo Evelin (discussed in Chapter 2). Or still in the "unnatural nuptials" between animality and humanity discussed in Chapter 3, when I address the works of Antonia Baehr, Marcela Levi and Lucía Russo, Xavier Le Roy, and Eiko & Koma. The partial, or total erasure of the figure of the dancer is also central to the pieces by Mette Edvardsen, Mette Ingvartsen, and Manuel Pelmus that I analyze in Chapter 2. Finally, all the works discussed under the rubric of the "body as archive" in Chapter 4 can be seen in this a-personal perspective as well. Indeed, the dance reenactments discussed in that chapter are crucial chronopolitical and choreopolitical critiques of neoliberal self-investment. It is precisely because they refuse the compulsion to create novelty while embracing the autonomous force of a choreographically impersonal singularity (the work being reenacted) that dance reenactments become exemplary gestures of radical hospitality in a context of recrudescent exclusionary politics. Reenactments are about letting the stranger enter. Unconditionally. As singularity.

Neoliberalism, psychopathology, and the choreosomatics of resistance

Given that "the production of subjectivity is at the core of capitalism" (Kunst 2015: 19), and given that subjectivity is "the single largest commodity we produce, because it goes into the production of all other commodities" (Lazzarato 2010: 14), it follows that specific symptoms around neoliberalism's main character and product, *the self-performing, self-invested Self*, start to condition the somatic and the psychological. Whole new psychopathologies of cognitive capitalism—to paraphrase the title of a recent two-volume anthology on this topic—take hold of bodies, dreams, desires, and discourses (De Boever and Neidich 2013). However, in a perverse twist, it is not

even that psychopathology (mania, panic, chronic insomnia, depression) offers an outside to contemporary subjectivity, a momentary escape from neoliberal reason (even if such escape is experienced as deep suffering and social alienation). As Jason Smith reminds us, in neoliberal subjectivity and corporeality even its psychopathologies become one more "technique of control"—thanks to the proliferation of diagnoses that constantly endorse, name, and track those pathologies (Smith 2013: 41). Diagnosis becomes a technique of subjection. Through it, neoliberal pharmaco-power affirms its interpellative force by fusing subjectification with the physiological and the cellular thanks to the prescription of drugs tailored (often times just opportunistically retailored) to ever more proliferating psychopathologies—from chronic shyness syndrome to depression to ADHD to erectile dysfunction to panic disorder to chronic insomnia and chronic fatigue (Angell 2011; Kirsch 2010; Preciado 2013; Whitaker 2010).

Significantly, it is always the *individual* who is ill, even as panic, lack of sleep, and depression become widespread civilizational pandemics in the expanded West. Significantly, all the palliatives offer only one promise: to return the individual to accepted performances of the entrepreneurial Self. Just one example: a 1995 ad for Prozac printed in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* promotes the new drug's "promise": "It delivers the therapeutic triad: confidence, convenience, compliance" (reproduced in Angell 2011). That last word being the first imperative for neoliberal performance of individual conformity, since "neoliberalism governs our everyday activities through an embodied habituation" (Chaput 2010: 4).

In Chapter 1, when discussing the work of Trajal Harrell, we will see how neoliberal psychopathologies undergo a serious choreographic and corporeal critique precisely via the metabolic interactivity between dancers and pharmaceutical drugs. At stake is the interface corporeality-subjectivity, and the realities one makes with the matters of the world, away from their prescribed functions of subjection and convenient compliance. In this sense, once again, singularities precipitate a transformation at the level of the body. They demonstrate the continuous existence of spaces of freedom and potentiality, even in the most controlled situation. A choreosomatics of resistance.

Choreopolitics, freedom, risk, and nonperformance

Defining the notion of "choreopolitical" (and distinguishing it from the notion of "choreopolice") I wrote, elsewhere:

> The adjectival "political" defined as the movement of freedom is a difficult, ever-evolving commitment. It is less predicated on a subject than on a *movement* (*bewegung*), defined by intersubjective *action*, that, moreover must be learned, rehearsed, nurtured, and above all experimented with, practiced, and experienced. Again and again, and again and again,

> and in every repetition, through every repetition, renewed. And what is the practice that needs to be practiced in order to ensure that the political does not vanish from the world? Precisely that thing called freedom. The vanishing of the political thing from the world is the vanishing of the experience and practice of movement as freedom.
>
> (Lepecki 2013: 14–15)

Performances of the neoliberal Self(ie) inform, indeed perform, the illusion of the contemporary subject's putative empowerment and freedom. As Wendy Brown makes quite clear in her analysis of the effects of neoliberalism on contemporary subjectivity, and on the very possibility of democracy, this supposed empowerment of the subject comes with two major losses, two essential dis-empowerments. At the level of affect, the economization of one's psychic, affective, erotic, or love "investments" is accompanied by the inevitable anxiety that permeates any transaction that bets on the expectation of a profitable return. Thus, the whole foundation of life, including emotional and love life, is premised on the notion of personal risk. Moreover, risk is perceived as purely individual, since for neoliberal subjectivity the social no longer exists as a body in and of solidarity. Thus, "populations are cleaved between those who master these arts of risk management and those who fail to do so" (Martin 2012: 65); between those who know how to perform in the risky motions of a hypertrophied market, and those who do not, cannot, or prefer not to, perform. Regardless which side you find yourself in, anxiety prevails.

The ubiquitous notion that life is essentially a game of individual risk reinforces demands not for solidarity or communal life, but for increased performances of individualized security. Thus, the political as open field of potentiality, dialogical relationality, and the practice of freedom is replaced by controlled little freedoms, preconditioned by the sensation of safety that pre-given possible choices offer to subjectivity.

This condition of little freedoms and pre-given choices under a permanent state of anxiety, which nevertheless demands ongoing self-assured performances of the self in the public sphere (who would bet on, or risk being with, an insecure Self?!); these performances that aim at maximizing what each Self can profit from public acts of self-investment, create new challenges, new problems, and new difficulties to performances of resistance and choreographies of dissent.

The question (for art and for life) then becomes: in supposedly free and open democratic societies, how does one imagine and perform more potent notions and motions of freedom? How does one think and choreograph "freedom beyond the bounds of liberal individualism" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 179)? As we will see in Chapters 2 and 5, the quest for a place of freedom, away from the busy space of consumption filled with poor yet always clear possible choices, informs the relation in recent choreography between dance, darkness and blackness.

In an era of supposedly free individualization, how does one perform and enact other modalities for collective life, how does one bring about the singularity of something else, some other mode of sociality made of singularities? In an era of "experience economies" how does one rescue experience from poor interactivity and open it up to the unexpected potentials of participation? In an era of "affective capitalism" how does one rescue affect away from individualized and psychologized Self(ie)-satisfaction, from the anguishes of neoliberal capitalism's psychopathologies? These are questions for a certain kind of performance, a performance that is perhaps best described as "nonperformance," to use the expression recently coined by Fred Moten (Moten 2015: n.p.).

In his lecture "Blackness and nonperformance," delivered at MoMA in September of 2015, Moten defined "nonperformance" as being not really about a mere refusal to perform, but a qualified, highly strategic, and highly political refusal to perform under the normative (ir)rationalities that condition and impose their own (i)logics as the only possible/permissible/acceptable ones under which performances can take place, are allowed to take place, and in taking place, are validated as being (the only) valid performances. The dance works analyzed in this book all offer alternatives to those invisible irrationalities permeating contemporary subjectivity, controlling it from within. Their singularities are the performance of nonperformance.

Dance's critical-political singularities

So, why dance, one might ask? Why is it that dance is perceived as gathering the critical-political positivities, the performative-corporeal elements, to enact such a difficult critique of our current condition? One possible explanation is derived from the constitutive elements of dance, which approximate it quite closely to the problems in politics and subjectivity outlined above. These elements are: ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring, performativity, and the performance of affective labor. They should be seen as singularities in the sense explained above: as defining an evental zone that objectively expresses a problem or set of problems. In this case, this zone is called dance.

Those six qualities, traits or singularities are responsible for dance's capacity to harness and activate critical and compositional elements crucial to the dismantling of the set of problems imposed over corporealities and subjectivities by neoliberal rationality. Indeed, dance's *ephemerality*, the fact that dance leaves no object behind after its performance, demonstrates the possibility for creating alternative economies of objecthood in the arts—by showing that it is possible to create artworks away from regimes of commodification and fetishization of tangible objects. Ephemerality also begs for a rearticulation of temporal vectors, since the ephemeral is not what has just passed (away), but that which, because it passes, haunts every second of the present with its potential return. Ephemerality impregnates the

interstices of time with a messianic dimension, thanks to which the past reveals itself to be not simply made of whatever is gone from present time, but as a dimension of potentiality of matter deeply woven into the fabric of the future. Ephemerality is already dance's afterlife, the promise of an incalculable *return without profit*.

As for dance's inescapable *corporeality*, it indicates, via the adverbial, the always-circumstantial reality of the physiological, its dependence on, or deep relation to, economic, linguistic, political forces as well as the forces of imagination and desire—regardless of whether these forces belong to the world of actuals or to the world of virtuals. Corporeality displaces from the noun "body" any stable onto-historical projections, and reveals that something we call "the body" is nothing other than a formation of such projections. Corporeality reveals "the body" as sheer transitivity—but this transitivity is also its main power, since it is connected to its capacity to resist, insist, invent. Corporeality constantly demonstrates to dancers and audiences alike concrete possibilities to embody-otherwise—since a dancer's labor is nothing else than to constantly embody, disembody, and re-embody, to incorporate as well as to excorporate, thus permanently refiguring corporeality and therefore proposing improbable subjectivities, modes of living, moving, affecting, being affected. As counter-factory of resistance, the recent resurfacing of dancing in experimental choreography, wildly, relentlessly, persistently as in Sarah Mitchelson's group piece *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012), Trajal Harrell's opening solo in *Used, Abused, and Hung Out to Dry* (2013) or in Miguel Gutierrez's duo *Age and Beauty Part 1* (2014), indicate dance's capacity to make bodies produce their own endo-drugs, their own non-patented and non-controlled substances countering pharmaco-power's drive for a compliant subject, their own choreosomatics of resistance. Along and around and with which, we gather for more.

Dance's *precariousness*—which springs at a physical level from dance's necessary and ongoing play with forces, and at a social level from its subaltern position in the general economy of the arts—performs, bespeaks, and underlines the current, implacable, and problematic precarization of life, brought by the momentarily triumphant neoliberal globalization of financial capitalism. Randy Martin has written on the relations between dance's potentiality for a critique of neoliberal precarization: "For precarity to yield some form of debt that generates an expansive sociality and not simply be all subsuming or consuming—as the recent financial debacle threatens—attention will need to be paid to what is made in movement together. A politics of precarity would need to dance between a ceiling of debt that has become punitive, and a floor of forgiveness that does not interrogate what we want to be liable for" (Martin 2012: 63).

Dance's deep relationship to *scoring*, or choreographing, exposes commanding and imperative forces not only embedded in the practice of choreography, but in the very logic of neoliberal governmentality, what Michel Foucault, in the late 1970s, could discern as constituting the triangle

"sovereignty, discipline and government," held in place by security and implemented by what Foucault called "the conduct of others" (Foucault 1982: 794): an intriguing choreographic way to describe how power operates intersubjectively in liberal (and neoliberal) governmentality. Indeed, as a system of command, choreographic scoring reveals the formation of obedient, disciplined, and (pre)formatted bodies—technically and subjectively fit to produce and (more importantly perhaps) to reproduce certain staged images conveyed by an authorial will. And yet, the risky uncertainty in the act of dancing keeps in place a certain degree of improbability and freedom in the performance outcome. The consequence of this degree of freedom, for Foucault, is that "in societies like ours" the fact that conduct may not be absolutely prescribed by power makes "the desire to determine the conduct of others be *even greater*" (Foucault 1994: 729, translation and emphasis mine). Crucial element in the formation of dance as an art form, choreography does have inevitable political reverberations across contemporary art practices. Choreography, once enacted, displays disciplined bodies negotiating their participation within a regime of obedience for the sake of bringing an art piece into the world. Thus, it becomes a site for investigating agency, compliance, the force of imperatives, and the capacity to collectively surrender oneself, as dancer, to an outside force. Scoring also links choreography to conceptual art, as linguistic instructions have been used by several conceptual artists (Yoko Ono, George Brecht, Vito Acconci, Allan Kaprow, Robert Smithson, Bruce Nauman) to articulate sets of possible as well as impossible actions, revealing how any system of command is always filled with the cracks that will bring it down.

Because dance does what it sets itself up to do, because it always establishes a contract, or promise, between choreographic planning and its actualization in movement, it inevitably reveals an essential *performativity* at the core of its aesthetic project (if we understand performativity as general theory of how citational effects are implemented and iterated, and where statements and particularly promises acquire world-making force). Performativity in choreography demonstrates that what matters is not meaning-making, but "who is the master" (Deleuze 1990: 18) that will orientate the entire field of distribution of discourses and things, who will direct the relations between motions and things, so that from this orientation expressive elements (verbal non-verbal, affective, etc.) may or may not find and make sense. What matters is who will be in charge of "conducting conducts" ("*conduire des conduites*" Foucault 1994: 237, translation mine), even if "conducting at a distance" (Brown 2015: 117). Both of these principles of ruling (as distributed and concretely abstract as they might be) are what characterize the very essence of contemporary governmentality.[12] But simultaneously it is also what characterizes the principles of choreography: the conducting at a distance of other's conducts according to an invisible planning that nevertheless impels choreography's chosen subjects and bodies into motion. When principles of power policing the conduct of conducts are

aimed at the circulation of subjects within pre-established places and bodies made for circulation, we may talk then of choreopolice, just as Rancière talks of the police function (Rancière 2010).[13] Finally, the link between dance and performativity demonstrates a non-metaphoric implementation, or actualization, of that which pre-conditions dance: endless citationality of an always singular yet always dispersed (or semi-absent) source, which nevertheless insists in making a dance return: again and again, despite (or rather because of) its ephemerality. This insistence to return with a difference, this ethics of persisting while facing the demands of absence, constitutes dance's particular affective-political force within the broader field of contemporary art.

As for the *performance of affective labor*, if Bojana Kunst is correct in her assessment that the artist today is the quintessential figure of creative capitalism (Kunst 2015: 176–193), it is important to stress that of all possible figures of artists, Randy Martin reminds us that "dancers are the ideal laborers in an idealized creative economy" since they are the class of labor-force who best performs neoliberal *idealization* of creative work: "dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs—they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meager wages" (2012: 66). As both producers and objects of their own labor, dancers reveal dance as a system where creativity and corporeality fuse in and as work. This offers dance an opportunity for an urgent and embodied critique of neoliberal idealization of, and demand for, conformed and profitable creative labor. However, the fusion of creativity and corporeality is not necessarily condemned to inevitable subjection and exploitation. Povinelli proposes how certain kinds of uses of creativity when they fuse with certain kinds of uses of the body can generate "unintegrated life." Unintegrated in the systems that force life to integrate without resistance to the very systems that oppress it, that rob life from life. Unintegrated life is one thriving in potency and dissent, even if in the midst of exploitation, creating other modalities for living in what black studies scholar Alexander Weheliye describes as "the breaks, crevices, movements, languages, and such found in the zones between the flesh and the law" (Weheliye 2014: 11). This life in dissent, this life in integrity because unintegrated, may be found and created in the same exact place where one already is, since there is always an "errant aspect of materiality," what Povinelli calls "carnality" (2011: 109) and Fred Moten calls "blackness" (Moten 2003, 2008). The errant carnality of a materiality making life and world away from neoliberal ideals of creativity and creative labor is what I will call, in Chapters 2 and 6, the political potential of *imagination*—to propose another word for creativity freed from the conformed obligations of neoliberal exploitation. In those same chapters, I align this errant imagination incarnate with blackness, as defined by Moten, Weheliye, and Michelle M. Wright. As enfleshed

resistance to neoliberal, neocolonial, and racist ambitions to run all aspects of life for the profitability of a Self-praising self, blackness is a central concept throughout this book.

Once we take all the aspects just outlined (which, again, are all *constitutive* of dance's singularity as artistic practice), it becomes clear why dance has become an energizing and catalyzing element in contemporary art and in contemporary critical thought. Dance experiments with acute critiques of the current conditions of existence. In this sense, dance's most significant singularity is its capacity for gathering and articulating the set of defining problems in neoliberal production of subjectivity as it produces countermoves and counterdiscourses. Because the singularity that transforms spaces of circulation into spaces of freedom and of moving political potentialities has a specific name: the dancer.[14]

Voices

To conclude this introduction a few words on theory. This book believes in theory and is indebted to theory. It is indebted to choreographic and critical commitments to theory, in the sense that theory, as the work of delimitating a problematic field, cartographing and identifying the forces that define that field, and searching for the concepts that allow us to address the problems at hand, is also a practice of thought intrinsic to artistic and discursive doings. The reason this book looks at the particular theoretical fields that mostly inform it, namely black studies (particularly indebted to the scholarship of Fred Moten, Michele D. Wright, Alexander G. Weheliye, Sylvia Wynter, and Katherine McKittrick), continental philosophy (deeply influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin), political theory (in conversation with Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, and Stefano Harney), and dance and performance studies (indebted to the scholarship of José Muñoz, Shannon Jackson, Rebecca Schneider, Mark Franko, and Randy Martin), is because many of these authors and certainly these fields of critical discursive practices are being read, discussed, used, expanded, and contested by the artists whose works are addressed in this book.

It is always important to remember, once and again, that the commitment to theory is only one: to discover, performatively, "in what hybrid forms, then, may a *politics* of the theoretical statement emerge?" (Bhabha 1993: 22). Those hybrid forms certainly include choreography. So it is never about making "one's" theory on or over "someone else's" artistic works. It is rather about co-working theories that are always co-made in the space between artistic-performative practices and critical-discursive ones. It is about assembling works with works. In this sense, theory is impersonal because it is in itself the expression of relations. It is impersonal and yet it has to remain intimate. Only within dialogical proximity, intimacy between artistic and critical makings, can we find the necessary and pressing concepts needed to produce art, to compose dances, and to write theory—in

rigorous coimagination.[15] Here, performance studies methodologically aligns itself with what contemporary artistic practices already do when working on the creation of their events. Both promote improbable, unexpected encounters and "unnatural participations" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 240–260) between discourses, disciplines, methods, ideas, notions, and modes of expression. Theory, as the activity of daringly gathering what should not "properly" be found working together according to certain disciplined regimes of scholarship and to certain cliché images of autonomous artistic and academic work, corresponds to Gilles Deleuze's understanding that concepts are not generic entities but name concrete events. For Deleuze, the events concepts express are specific *encounters*. It is in this sense that concepts have "their zones of presence" (Deleuze 1994: xx): problematic fields resulting from particular encounters between singularities populating specific situations. Thus, the zone of presence of a concept defines the contours of a problem. The latter must be seen not as an impediment or blockage, but as the precise delineation of the conditions that produce and inform the particular situation as worth being problematized. Moreover, conceptual zones of presence do not refer to essences (for instance, to the being of Dance, to the being of Theory) but to the empirical effects of singularities in relation: what a particular work of dance is doing in a particular situation; what a particular work of theory is proposing and affecting in a particular moment and location. This is why concepts do not really belong to the theorist, to the philosopher (just as works of art do not really belong to the artist or the dancer), since, "concepts are indeed things, but things in their free and wild state, beyond 'anthropological predicates' " (Deleuze 1994: xxi). As free things, concepts (and works of art) constantly evade reification. As the wild things they are, they resist subjection to fixity. Just as a choreographic work needs to rearticulate itself in every reiteration, to re-singularize itself, so must concepts, and the theoretical fields they generate, endure movements of rearticulation, calibration, adjustment: "I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them" (Deleuze 1994: xxi).

Peripheral, mobile, problematic, "impersonal," as Deleuze would say, the autonomous wild state of concepts is what makes them never become an individual's *opinion*. Theory is what escapes the parasitic noise of opinionating, what counters those utterances that make us be "buried within ourselves; we send out signals, gestures, and sounds indefinitely and uselessly. [...] Everyone speaks, no one hears; direct and reciprocal communication is blocked. [...] all play their favorite instrument, whose name is their own" (Serres and Schehr 2007: 121). As Claire Bishop writes in *Artificial Hells*, "In a world where everyone can air their views to everyone we are faced not with mass empowerment but with an endless stream of egos leveled to banality" (2012: 277). This banality is called opinion, and it is banal not because it is widespread but because it is self- and selfie-oriented. Against

it, we have concepts. Theoretical wild things interanimating the collective labor of making art and discourse.

Summary of chapters

In Chapter 1, *Moving as some* thing *(or, some things want to run)*, I discuss the uses of things in choreography as well as the emancipation of the dancer from subject to thing. After establishing a general distinction between objects and things through an archeology of the notion of thing in 1960s postmodern dance (particularly in Yvonne Rainer, in the minimalist sculpture of Robert Morris, and in the notion of wild thing in Brazilian neoconcretist visual artist Hélio Oiticica), I move to discuss in detail recent works by Trajal Harrell, Aitana Cordero, and João Fiadeiro where *things* appear as choreopolitical partners. The chapter proposes a political and performative theory of things, different from, and in opposition to, the "object oriented philosophy" and its onto-phenomenological drive of Graham Harman (2002, 2005), Levi Bryant (2014), and others. Instead, I expand Brian Massumi's notion that "neither potential nor activity is object-like" (Massumi 2011: 6) and therefore neither can be subject-like. The emphasis on an epistemology and politics of things, predicated on the importance of this concept in experimental dance of the 1960s, opens up lines of research for a contemporary understanding of dance's singularity within the arts. Moving as thing takes a predominant role when dance becomes an art of resistance within the neoliberal age of performance.

Chapter 2, *In the dark*, addresses the use of partial or total darkness in four works that I believe perform a choreographic critique of neoliberal 24/7 culture of "permanent illumination" Jonathan Crary identified in a recent book (Crary 2013: 5): *No Title* (2014) by Mette Edvardsen, *Speculations* (2011) by Mette Ingvartsen, *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* (Suddenly everywhere is black with people [2012]) by Marcelo Evelin, and *Preview* (2007) by Manuel Pelmus. While probing and problematizing the relations between darkness, potentiality, and freedom these works also offer a critique of enlightenment as an aesthetic and political project. Evelin's group piece in particular, ties this critique to the semantic-discursive-racial problematics of blackness, further complicating and adding power to the choreopolitical project of dancing in the dark.

In Chapter 3, *Limitrophies of the human: monstrous nature, thingly life, and the wild animal* I expand the notion of thing to the animality of thingly life. Looking at the collaborative work of Eiko & Koma (oscillating between installation, choreography, time-based art, body art, sculpture, sonic art), the collaborative piece *Monstrous Nature* (2011) by Marcela Levi and Lucía Russo, at Xavier Le Roy's group choreography *Low Pieces* (2009–2011), and a recent work by Antonia Baehr (in collaboration with her mother, Bettina von Arnim, and von Arnim's dog Tocky) *My Dog is My Piano* (2011), I analyze the anthropo-logo-carnivore-phallo-centric critique

contained in these works. To move beyond the limits of the human becomes the necessary operation for the advent of a mode of living away from the imperatives of normative performances of subjectivity: the juridical person, the psychological individual. Feminist, queer, post-colonial, and critical race studies critiques of the figure of "Man" (McKittrick 2015; Wynter 2003) and philosophical critiques of the notion of "Person" (Esposito 2011) are essential in this move with the animal.

The impersonal as choreopolitical force becomes a central concept activated by the dancer's body as living archive. In Chapter 4, *The body as archive: will to reenact and the afterlives of dances*, I address "reenactments" as chronopolitical operations in experimental dance. As such, they precipitate a crisis of authorship, while advancing a (trans)generational ethics of (impersonal) transmission. Works by Julie Tolentino, Martin Nachbar, Xavier Le Roy, and Richard Move are the chapter's main focus. Reenactments are quite often received with harsh criticism, as if they were symptoms of a supposed crisis and decay in artistic creativity and originality. Against this view, I propose that the will to reenact is the will to perform chronopolitical acts informed by an ethics of "returning," by a dance of reflection, by affective transmission—all essential in resisting the neoliberal impetus to never look back, as if any longing for the past was a mere expression of infantile, regressive, or naïf nostalgia. It is precisely because they are not new, and yet bring into the word totally different singularizations than their "originals," that reenactments are crucial sites of historical resistance. As choreographic performances of return to and of events never before lived by the reenactors, reenactments demonstrate the fact that, as Georges Didi-Huberman states, "survival disorientates history" (Didi-Huberman 2009: 85, translation mine).

I push Didi-Huberman's notion further in Chapter 5, *Choreographic angelology: the dancer as worker of history (or, remembering is a hard thing)*. Indeed, it is towards the disorientating force of survival, and towards the nonorientated movement of errancy, that choreographer Ralph Lemon inflected his work, his choreography, his life once he encountered, during his own version of prospective historical return to the recent history of racial violence that still scars the US South, an improbable partner and co-creator, Walter Carter, born in 1907. With Lemon and Carter, I address the disorientating work of survival, recurrence, and invention precipitated by the singularity of a true encounter between a choreographer and the one-hundred-year-old former sharecropper. Two black American men, who, in the zone of their encounter, cocreate an entire choreologics in order to initiate another kind of dance, expressive of what Michelle Wright has called "the physics of blackness" (2015). Taking seriously Wright's proposition that such physics is no metaphor, but actually informs the concrete realities of black life and its motions, I understand this physics as necessarily parapraxical, obdurate, filled with cuts, gaps, zones of turbulence, and breaks. It is necessarily a physics of singularities, a physics that goes against the

foundational notion of laminar flow in classical physics as the ideal model for Western theatrical dance. The importance of recovering and reifying laminar flow as the physical basis for current neoliberal kinetics, where one is supposed "to move without friction" (Harney and Moten 2013: 87) demonstrates how crucial another logic of physics must be defended. Given that Ralph Lemon has explicitly referred to Walter Carter as an "angel of history," after Walter Benjamin's expression in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1968b: 257), I use the figure of the angel to problematize how "the physics of blackness" proposes an altogether different physics for a dance of obdurate resistance. Taking from the notion of angel as ideal messenger discussed by Michel Serres in his (surprisingly non-political) account for contemporary privileging of flow (Serres 1995), to the notion of angel of history in Walter Benjamin, the black angelology co-created by Lemon and Carter emerges as powerful singularity: to persist in the detritus of capitalism's history of eco-colonialism and racism.

The book ends with an afterthought on the notion of witnessing performance in the age of neoliberal dis-experience. In *Afterthought: Four notes on witnessing performance in the age of neoliberal dis-experience* I invoke two recent pieces, Mette Ingvartsen's *Speculations* (discussed under a different perspective in Chapter 2) and Jérôme Bel's *Cour d'Honneur* (2013) in order to discuss the relations between spectatorship, forensics, and testimony in neoliberal sensibility. These questions bring us back to where we started. To the conditions conditioning life and performance in the age of neoliberal nonexperience, and to those moments, or singularities, when a choreopolitical operation into neoliberal conditioning undoes them, from within.

Two last prewords on style: description and epigraph

The following chapters linger quite often in description. Dance scholarship has been plagued by a crisis set up, on one hand, by an imperative to describe, and on the other hand, by the frustration (voiced as early as 1725 by Pierre Rameau in his exemplarily meticulous dance manual), that description never, ever, can capture the entirety of the work described.[16] So, when I say that quite often I linger in description I do not mean I engage in a minute verbal transcription of the works. Rather, I try to offer an empirical account, anexact yet rigorous, of those moments in the works when something *happens*. When "critical points, points of inflection," in other words, singularities inflect the work in a mattering difference. Those eventful events must be carefully attended to. Not as a scholastic celebration of hermeneutics, or a recapturing of deconstruction. Attending to the details of performance is the necessary practice of a responsive empiricism that attends to the micro-events that within each work, makes it work, creates its critical-political action, generates a differential movement. Thus, each chapter proposes a "science of the singular,"[17] expressing and describing the political effects of those works besides and beyond their insertion within

explicit political activism or explicit socially oriented art. I hope those moments in the text neither bore you too much for its details, nor frustrate you too much for their unavoidable incompleteness.

I have always loved epigraphs. When writing theoretically, epigraphs function as true singularities, since they are points of entry, vortexes or rents in the fabric of discourse, invitations for unanticipated variations of their supposedly original meaning, challenges, riddles, black holes. They persist by themselves, between title and text, but they also allow and energize movements within their zone of presence; movements with, against, alongside, or beyond what they first promised. Thus, when I started to work on this manuscript, all the chapters began with one or sometimes two epigraphs, as is the case in the vast majority of my writing. Then, the news from Routledge arrived. Recently, epigraphs had started to be considered "ornament," unnecessary excess, an unprofitable use of someone else's words. Being ornamental, epigraphs are deemed both unnecessary and luxurious, and therefore are no longer considered to be protected by fair use laws that (still) rule the use of citations printed *within* the body of academic texts.

I will not get into the problem of where exactly the proper "within" of an academic text's "body" begins; of where the proper delimitations of proper academic work lie; of where is located the barrier beyond which epigraphs gain their newfound categorization as ornament. Jacques Derrida (1987), Fred Moten (2003), and Shannon Jackson (2011) have discussed brilliantly and at length the support-work of the "*parergon*" and the politics of exclusions and divisions of labor within and around artistic works where more or less ornamental, more or less ignored, elements endure. I bring this issue as a concluding remark to this introduction to note that the recent transformation of epigraphs from conceptual-theoretical-poetic precipices, singular impersonal points of entry, affective performances of spiritual and intellectual blessings, energizing provocations, and conceptual riddles into *ornament* expresses yet another process in the neoliberal economization and financialization of what Karl Marx called the "general intellect." I bring this topic to reveal the many and subtle ways something as "personal" and "free" as the writing of a book in a supposedly free society is not outside the condition that conditions our neoliberal situation. This writing has already been preconditioned, by financialization and its horror to whatever stands in idle non-profitability, in indeterminate phase-state between a title and its text.

Of course, reasonable neoliberal rationality says that I could and should have paid up. I could have waited a couple more months for all the permissions and non-permissions to arrive, or not arrive. I could have delayed the publication a little, or better still: I should have been more effective in my planning. But, frankly, I'd rather tell you this story, and explain why, in some chapters of *Singularites: dance in the age of performance*, you will find, once in a while, the apparently baroque and odd phrase: "if this chapter were to have an epigraph, it would be ..." followed by the excerpt that would have been there—both gathering and opening, never framing—as the text's

hovering horizon. So in case you feel like it, once you run into that sentence, or into variations of it, you can just scribble whatever follows at the top of the first page of the respective chapter. If you feel like it, you may even start by scribbling the one below at the top of this Introduction's first page. Because, if this book were to have an epigraph, it would be the following:

> *movement, which is solely composed of singularities, and which amasses neighboring, surrounding zones, unfolding itself in a space that it creates by deviations or inflexions, advancing by connections that are never pre-established—from the collective to the individual and the reverse, from the inner to the outer and the reverse, from the voluntary to the involuntary and the reverse. The exploration of surrounding areas, the manufacture of singularities, and deciding: these are the actions of reason.*
>
> (Deleuze 2005: 722)

Notes

1 For a discussion of the political dimensions in Graham's early works, including *Lamentation* see (Franko 1995: 38–74); for a discussion of the effects of the Vietnam war on Yvonne Rainer's performances in the late 1960s see (Lambert-Beatty 2008: 199–251).
2 See (Spivak 1988); (Gilroy 2005); (Quijano 2007); (Césaire 2010).
3 See for instance, Robin Harris, former member of Thatcher's policy team, defending Thatcher's "respect" and sense of "debt" to Pinochet: "[Thatcher] also took a positive view of Pinochet's 17 years in power. There was certainly great violence. But the loss of life, most of which occurred in the first months when a civil war raged, was less than in other similar situations." Harris concludes his article for *The Telegraph* with these astonishing words: "Margaret Thatcher has nothing to be ashamed of in defending Augusto Pinochet, when others refused to do so. But he was lucky to find such a champion." (Harris 2006: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3635244/Thatcher-always-honoured-Britains-debt-to-Pinochet.html). See also ("Thatcher Stands by Pinochet," BBC News, 1999: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/304516.stm).
4 On the distinction between "choreopolitics" and "choreopolice" see (Lepecki 2013).
5 Throughout, "individualization" is used to express modes of subject-formation that have the juridical "person" or the normative-private-psychological "individual" as privileged models. "Individuation" is a concept drawn from the philosophy of Georges Simondon. It refers to ongoing, modulated processes of relational becomings of subjectivity, and that momentarily coalesce into a specific formation he called "mode of individuation." Modes of individuation always embrace their constitutive multiplicity, relationality, and openness. As we will see, "singularities" are the attractors that precipitate these zones or modes of individuation, which are always and necessarily "transindividual." See (Simondon 2005). For a critical analysis of Simondon's notions of individuation as transindividuation see (Combes 2013). For a critique of performances and affects informing and producing the figure of the individual in contemporary neoliberal capitalism, see (Protevi 2009: 3–59).
6 "The actualization of the virtual is singularity" (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 149), and "We can speak of events only as singularities deployed in a problematic field" (Deleuze 1990: 56).

7 "Singularities are distributed in a properly problematic field and crop up in this field as topological events to which no direction is attached" (Deleuze 1990: 104). For a discussion of Deleuze's views see (Smith 2011: 159). For a recent and close analysis on the political ontology of "choreographing problems" as "expressive concepts" see (Cvejic 2015).

8 "Performativity is about a differential and differentiating process of materializing and mattering," writes Athena Athanasiou (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 140; see also 140–148).

9 For a feminist critique of Lazzarato's notion of affective capitalism, see the special issue of the journal *Ephemera*, 7 (1) (February 2007).

10 The proximity of this definition of performativity and the Deleuzian notion of singularity is startling. See for instance (Smith 2011: 156–157).

11 On the ways capitalism constantly captures imagination, and how imagination constantly escapes capitalism see (Schiwy 2007); (Protevi 2009); (Haiven 2011); (Harney and Moten 2013).

12 "*L'exercice du pouvoir consiste à 'conduire des conduites' et à aménager la probabilité. Le pouvoir, au fond, est moins de l'ordre de l'affrontement entre deux adversaries, ou de l'engagement de l'un à l'égard de l'autre, que de l'ordre du 'gouvernement'*" (The exercise of power consists in 'conducting conducts' and managing probability. At the bottom, power is less of the order of conflict between two adversaries, or of the order of engaging one against the other, than it is of the order of 'government') (Foucault 1994: 237).

13 For Rancière, police is not just a specific governmental institution It is a mode of inscription of power into subjectivity and life, that leaves no space for a void or supplement where life can be experienced in disagreement with the law, in dissensus with habit. In this sense, police is a function of power: "The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void or supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places." Essential for the police function, for its insertion at the level of the body is the kinetic imperative to keep moving in conformity: "The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation" (Rancière 2010: 36, 37). The necessity to control and direct movement, in order to control and direct life, and subjectivity is what prompts me to consider the concept of "choreopolice" which I opposed to "choreopolitical" (see Lepecki 2013).

14 On this particular role of the dancer in regards the event of true politics as ongoing processes of singularization through the motions of actualization and counteractualization, see (Deleuze 1993: 154–161).

15 On the practice of "coimagination" as theoretical mode for performance analysis, see (Lepecki 2015a).

16 For an account, see (Lepecki 2004).

17 Against a generalizing universalism, Dorothea Olkowski advances this notion departing from Henri Bergson's and Gilles Deleuze's empiricism. See (Olkowski 1999: 176–209).

1 Moving as some *thing* (or, some things want to run)

A memory

June 2009. Berlin. A hot and unexpectedly humid Thursday in an otherwise bland and chilly spring. Clouds are gathering slowly, lazily piling up, while a gentle breeze licks the treetops at the Tiergarten. In a few hours, this year's edition of the performing arts festival IN TRANSIT is set to begin at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of World Cultures, or HKW).[1] In 2007, thanks to Johannes Odenthal, who led the performing arts department at HKW for many years and founded the festival in 2002, I received an invitation from HKW's principal director, Bernd Scheerer, to curate two consecutive editions of the festival: IN TRANSIT 08 and IN TRANSIT 09. On the early evening of that Thursday, June 11, the second and last festival I curated would open its doors to the public.

The 2009 festival had been thematically organized around a short phrase written by the poet and performance and critical theorist Fred Moten—one that appears in the title of both the first and last chapters of Moten's groundbreaking book *In the break: the aesthetics of the black radical tradition* (2003): "Resistance of the Object." I had seen how this phrase had become increasingly relevant for understanding developments in experimental dance and performance from the mid- to late 2000s, and so it became, with Moten's blessing and permission, the festival's subtitle, as well as its curatorial frame. In a short text for the program, I described the festival's concept in the following terms:

> "Resistance of the Object" is the theme for IN TRANSIT 09. This phrase emphasizes the recent and increasingly visible phenomenon in the performing arts of exploring the fine line between objecthood and subjectivity. Thus, much of the theater, body art, dance, performance, video, installation and lectures presented during the 10 days of the festival directly address the current centrality of objects in performance. Sometimes playfully, sometimes cruelly, artists from five continents will explore how subjects become objects, objects become subjects, and how neither can escape the call to act.

> "Resistance of the Object" is a phrase drawn directly from the work of US performance and critical theorist Fred Moten—a guest throughout IN TRANSIT 09 who will open the lecture series. Moten's work reminds us how colonialism and capitalism in its past and current racisms and modes of subjectivation are predicated on systematic, pervasive, and institutional reduction of entire human populations to the condition of objects. Yet, even when reduced to objecthood, resistance has happened and continues to happen—particularly through performances that can only be called: radical.

I wanted to convey the importance of the notion "resistance of the object" in relation not only to what Moten calls "the black radical tradition" in performance—but to all kinds of minoritarian performances. The artists presented in the festival included Adrian Piper, El Periférico de Objectos, Yingmey Duan, Julie Tolentino and Ron Athey, Mapa Teatro, Nevin Aladag, and Trajal Harrell, to mention just a few names.

Another of those names was that of Colombian visual and performance artist Maria José Arjona. I had invited Arjona because I wanted to include a work that would explicitly draw the link between Moten's political-aesthetic concept of resistance with a performance of bodily endurance. I wanted to present a piece that would directly express how the notion of agential objecthood could precipitate a making of time that altered our understanding of performance's relation to temporality thanks to the singularity of acts of resistance as acts of persistence. Thus, I asked Arjona to perform three works that are part of her longer *White Series* (2004–09): *Untitled* (2004), *remember to remember* (2006), and *Karaoke* (2006). These would be performed consecutively over the ten days of the festival in a single space built exclusively for them: first *Untitled*, for five days, then *remember to remember*, for four days, and finally *Karaoke*, which would unfold throughout the entirety of the festival's final day.

The technical preparations were delicate. Usually, the *White Series* takes over an entire art gallery's space and is performed for a period that lasts between ten days and two weeks. In the context of the festival in Berlin, the temporal frame was fine—the series would run for its entire ten days. However, space was a problem. HKW's building was designed in the 1950s to be a Congress Hall and therefore constructed with many large windows and wide spaces of circulation—particularly its huge foyer. It does not really have galleries, properly speaking. But, even though the institution had to contend with several restrictions resulting from the building's status as a national monument, together with Arjona and the HKW's technical team we came up with a solution for the presentation of the three works from the *White Series*. In the huge, cavernous central foyer of HKW, we would create a long corridor, about fourteen meters long, four meters wide, and three meters high, constructed from wood panels painted white. The corridor would be open on top, roofless. This would become the space where

Arjona performed for the duration of the festival, for six to eight hours a day, every day.

Yet one small detail kept posing problems. The first part of the series, the piece *Untitled*, is structured as follows: from six to eight hours a day, for five consecutive days, Arjona slowly paces along the perimeter of the gallery. Dressed in a white T-shirt and white pants, barefooted, holding a small container from which she uses a piece of wire with a looped tip to draw liquid soap, Arjona continuously, stubbornly, meditatively, never pausing and constantly pacing, blows soap bubbles into the air. Hours and hours of pacing and blowing bubbles, blowing bubbles and pacing. But what at first seems to be an innocent, childlike, and gratuitous gesture, after a while starts to gain an uncanny resonance, coalescing into an image charged with tension, if not violence. As the delicate bubbles float around the space and eventually hit the walls or fall to the floor, they explode into vivid red stains: the liquid soap is laced with vermillion pigment. As the hours pass and days go by, and as Arjona continues to simply and methodically pace the floor while blowing bubbles into the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, her clothes, her hands and feet, increasingly begin to resemble battered flesh and raw meat. In deep silence, the kind of silence that only a methodically repeated, persistently performed action can create, the entire space seems to be the site of a terrible butchery. The accumulating blots and splashes of red paint synesthetically render visible the bubbles' inaudible cries. *Untitled* reveals a disavowed and repressed phonographic potential, a sonic-affective life rustling beneath the surface of matter.

But what was the small problem that this apparently simple performance kept posing? Only this: that in the institutional context of HKW, the bubbles' trajectories needed to be controlled, managed, and precisely tracked. These quasi-objects, these almost things, had to be carefully choreographed in advance, since HKW's building is a national monument, and the color schemes of its walls and ceilings must be protected and preserved. Which meant that even the tiniest bubble hitting the building's ceiling or walls would require a complete repainting. Especially problematic was the ascending flow of bubbles, since repainting the impressive foyer ceiling would mean incurring an enormous expense.

Thus, a task force was set up. HKW and IN TRANSIT technicians tested different combinations of water and soap, different kinds of pigment, mapped draft patterns in the foyer at various times of day and night, and tested different combinations of which doors would be opened or closed to street access. Eventually a solution was found: the right balance of soap, pigment, and water created a bubble that was slightly heavier than usual, with a tendency to be dragged downwards—but not too much, since otherwise the performance would not work—or at least not to float up to the ceiling right away; and a pigment was found that could be washed if a bubble happened to drift away from the assigned performance space, exit the long white corridor through one of the two large entrances, and burst upon

hitting the foyer's floor. (For some reason, the floor posed no problems for conservation.)

Yet the ceiling remained a big problem. Despite the effort to manipulate the liquid soap's density, and the mapping of draft flows in the foyer, some bubbles would still insist on floating up, and risk staining the ceiling. Thus, to be extra-safe, and with approval of Arjona, a light net was placed atop the white corridor. Air and light would still come in, but any deviant ascending bubble would burst against it. And thus, with a tight white mesh on top, a carefully prepared soap-water-pigment formula, and a more or less precise mapping of the draft currents in the foyer, *Untitled* was finally given a "go." The imponderable motions of things had been managed, contained, and forecast to a satisfactory level. But, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney write, "Some people want to run things, other things want to run" (Harney and Moten 2013: 51). Let's keep their sentence in mind since it offers a definition of thing that is absolutely related to *the choreographic impulse to govern*, the choreographic drive to "run things," and the nature of thing's kinetic resistance to their choreographic government. Their sentence, as simple as it is profound, will inform my discussion throughout this chapter, defining a "thing" as whatever escapes instrumental reason, whatever exists outside logics of manipulation, whatever is unconditioned, whatever actively wants to run away, escape, from being reduced to graspability and comprehension, whatever reminds us that "uncertainty surrounds the *holding* of things" (91, emphasis added).[2] And again, because it matters, and because it matters the thingness of matter, as much as materializes forms of controlling matters: "*uncertainty* surrounds the holding of things."

It is, as I said, a Thursday in June. Opening day. And it is, now, about two hours before the official opening. Spring almost over, clouds piling up, humidity rising. The idea had been that all of the installations, video works, and durational performances presented at the festival—including a sculpture by Adrian Piper, an interactive object-theater piece by Allen S. Weiss and Michel Nedjar, an installation by Julie Tolentino, the set, sound and videos of El Periférico de Objectos, videos by Nevin Aladag, and Arjona's *Untitled*—would be open to the public that day a bit before 7:00 PM, giving the audience about an hour to visit them before attending the performance by the Japanese butoh dance group Sankai Juku. Yet Maria José Arjona had made a request. In order for her to be properly performing *Untitled* when HKW's doors would open to the public, she had asked to begin blowing the bubbles earlier in the day. Which she did, stepping into the long white corridor and getting to work around 4:00 PM that afternoon.

It is now a bit before 5:30 PM. The lazy clouds have formed storm clusters castigating the city here and there, while the morning breeze had turned into gusts of hot air, occasionally bringing brief showers of rain. I am walking to HKW; I wanted to arrive there early to be sure that everything was on track for the opening, and anyway the rain was falling in other parts of the city. I am not too far from the building, just a couple more minutes to

get there, when my cellphone rings. On the other end of the line, I hear the voice of then HKW's technical director, Herman Volkery, who sounds *really* alarmed (which, let me assure you, does not happen often *at all*). "We have a huge problem!" he says, "We have to cancel the opening!" I freeze in my steps, and try to stay cool:

"Herman, what's going on?"

"The bubbles! They are everywhere! *The bubbles are everywhere!*"

The bubbles are everywhere!! How could it be? After all the testing, and the decision to place the security net on top of the corridor, and the mapping of drafts, the calibrated soap .... I dash to HKW, enter through the backdoor, and rush to the foyer. The scene is incredible. The bubbles *are* everywhere. And, right behind them, more or less all over the foyer, house technicians armed with butterfly nets are frantically chasing after the bubbles (where and how did they get those butterfly nets so fast?!, I never asked, and I still don't know ...), trying to catch them before they hit the walls, or worse, before they start ascending towards the very high ceiling. In the middle of it all is the long white corridor where Arjona, hands dripping with red paint that makes it look like she is bleeding, continues to pace methodically, apparently oblivious to the chaos around her, blowing her bubbles. All of a sudden, a durational performance, a politically inflected action painting, has become a kind of Tania Bruguera piece, a work of art interpellating the security system controlling the institutional behaviors and protocols that museums, galleries, and other art venues exercise over their objects and subjects. But this is not a Tania Bruguera piece. It is an Arjona piece. It was supposed to be about time and endurance and the violence embedded in the most innocuous of things. And yet ... *the bubbles are everywhere!!* How could it be, after so much planning!

Today I know that "Some people want to run things, other things want to run." But back then Harney and Moten had not yet written their book. I knew only about objects and their resistance, I did not know anything about the uncertainty surrounding the holding of things, nothing about things and their constitutive fugitivity. And yet once I stepped into the stained corridor of *The White Series*, trying to convey to Arjona the chaos outside, I remembered something else, something that Moten had written to me in an email in response to my invitation to give the opening talk at the festival: "André, I am less interested now in the resistance of the object than in the persistence of things." I had no idea back then what he meant. I was about to start to understand. I enter the stained white corridor, and it seems huge from within: it must be the bubbles adding dimension to it, expanding space with their wild, uncontrollable floating movements. I approach Arjona. She has been blowing bubbles for over an hour now, and is in a total daze, as happens to anyone who has been exhaling continuously for an extended period of time. The effects of hypocapnea, or "overbreathing," apparently.

Figure 1.1 Maria José Arjona performing *Untitled (Part of the White Series)* at Prometeo Gallery, 2008. Photo: Ted Heartshorn. Courtesy of the artist, Prometeo Gallery, and Mor-Charpentier.

The simple, repetitive action had already created another body, and with it another state of mind, altogether out of this world, drifting away, in sheer persistence. "Maria," I say. Nothing. "Maria!" She barely notices me, but then something like recognition emerges from the far regions of her being. I take this opening from her own bubble of action and blurt out: "Maria, the bubbles are everywhere, technicians are chasing them with butterfly nets, is this ok with you?" From the far away land of another time and life she slowly offers an answer: "It is ok André, it is ok ..." she whispers in between blows. I rush out, relieved, tell the technicians it is fine to chase the bubbles. The opening need not be cancelled.

But what had happened? What had led to this failure of governance over the movement of things, this breakdown in the forms of control that had been so well prepared and mapped and tested beforehand? Simply this: outside, the movement of things atmospheric had conspired with the movement of things enteric and an unforecasted summer storm was now blasting a gusting wind against the building, disrupting whatever draft patterns we had mapped in the foyer months ago, gusts of wind barging into the HKW building and its cavernous foyer, lifting up skirts, spreading scattering printed programs, propelling the bubbles, bringing out the butterfly nets. I look around as I step out of the installation corridor: the bubbles are everywhere. And then, I see. In the midst of it all, a presence. A still figure, larger than life,

a kind of off-centered-center of it all, the calm eye of the storm of drifting things whose movement will not be contained by whomever wishes to run it. Standing next to the big white corridor that was supposed to hold Maria José Arjona's bubbles, taking in the whole scene, hands crossed in front of his belly, an enormous joyful grin shaping his bespectacled face, taking it all in, I see no other than Fred Moten himself—surrounded by dozens of precarious, errant, fugitive things, each carrying a red cry within, each escaping its designated place and starting its wild movement, each bubble an exact and precise reminder that, as he would write with Stefano Harney four years later, "the movement of things will not cohere" (Harney and Moten 2013: 94).

A choreographic affirmation of things

A strong affirmation about things and movement takes place in 1966, at a moment when sculpture seems to want to extract itself from rigid categories of objecthood by turning variously to dance, film, photography, video, performance, and environmental or land art, and at a moment when dance is extracting itself from clichéd ways of handling bodies and movement by incorporating improvisational techniques, pedestrianism, sculpture, film, performance art, photography, video, and installation. It is an affirmation made by Yvonne Rainer, who writes halfway through a sentence in one of her most influential essays—as if not wanting to make too big of a deal out of it: "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself" (Rainer in Battcock 1968: 269). I find this affirmation stunning.

Though Rainer's essay "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*" was first published in 1968, it had in fact been written two years earlier, just after she finished creating her famous piece *Trio A* (first performed at the Judson Memorial Church in 1966).[3] As Carrie Lambert-Beatty has astutely noted, *Trio A* is a most ungraspable dance due to its use of a continuously sustained line of phrasing and an even distribution of energy: "the suppression of phrasing in *Trio A* makes the dance difficult to apprehend" (2008: 133). Rainer's desire to make a work that resisted being apprehended, prehended, comprehended is already an indication of an interest in the movement of things, and in the possibility of a thing-movement.

Diacritically, the emphasis in Rainer's sentence matters: "*thing*" in italics, the only time italics are used in a word that is not a title in Rainer's whole essay, turning the word into a singularity, making it jump beside itself, beyond itself, out of the text's flow, activating it into a mobility without end. And, syntactically, as well as philosophically and choreographically, the vagueness conveyed by Rainer's use of the determiner "some" also matters—since "a departure from classical conceptions is needed to accommodate vagueness" (Keefe and Smith 1999: 3). On one side of Rainer's clause then, we find a vague thing that, in moving, makes one move away

from (one's) selfhood ("some *thing*"). On the other side, concluding the clause, one self-moving-oneness of well-grounded intentional (or authorial) subjectivity ("oneself"). Between these two poles, between "some *thing*" and "oneself," a point of singularization, a critical move, or a teetering event is defined: the project of making dances moved by things, not selves. But the catch is this: if we *make* a thing move us, then we are no longer being moved by a thing: "our ignorance and our contempt for things is such that they are generally considered only and exclusively in a relation of subordination with respect to our subjective will and to our desires" (Perniola 2004: 109). This relation to subordination is exactly what turns things (any kind of thing, including organic matter, bodies, entire populations, concepts, ideas, dances) into objects. Thus, as soon as we make a thing move us, or make it move others, this making marks the forceful hand of a willing self—even when this self is expressing his or her will through an inorganic proxy. In other words, an object, an equipment, is just more self-willing, self-present, manipulative humanity; it is more subordinated living to the impositions of strong-willed selves and self-assured handlings. This is why to "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself" is easier said than done.

This was also not a choreographic problem that could be solved by means of chance operations. For Rainer, chance would not be the solution to the problem posed by the desire to shift, radically, the source of movement from (one)self to "some *thing*." Employed extensively, as is well known, in the work of John Cage and Merce Cunningham beginning in the early 1950s,[4] for Rainer chance procedures merely intervened in the redistribution of whatever had been previously made, whatever had been already crafted and tailored by intentionality, authorial selfhood, and a shared technique. Chance operations, to be sure, scrambled the already given, posed certain challenges (mostly to performers), and rearranged and rearticulated smooth choreographic objects, but it could not cause movement to be the expression of "some *thing*," and even less of a *vague* thing. At best, chance was the expression of a diluted authorial self. Rainer actually saw it as just another version of the same old authorial self-affirmation from which she was trying to escape. Addressing Cage directly with sharp critical lucidity, Rainer noted that the desire to withdraw both the authorial self and signification from the work through the use of chance procedures inevitably refers us "back to the original flamboyant artist-gesture" (including the gesture of drawing lots or throwing dice), and thus puts the audience back in the "position of appreciating a manifestation of yet one more Artist as Transcendental Ego" (Rainer 1981: 70).

Rainer's proposition in her 1966 statement was of an entirely different nature. To "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself" meant that chance procedures could never be that moving thing, since they remained tied to the flamboyant gestures of a transcendent authorial ego.[5] So what would that emphatically vague thing be? How would *it* dance, or move? Again, easier said than done.

Could it be that the answer lies in the activation of "stuff" capable of physically causing bodies to move around, more or less against or beyond someone's will and control, and more or less against the utilitarian purpose of the object's intentional, graspable design? Could it be that the answer was to be found not in overdetermined chance procedures, but in the wild autonomy of things? Six years prior to Rainer's writing Simone Forti explored this possibility in her groundbreaking pieces first performed at the Reuben Gallery in New York on a program she shared with Claes Oldenburg and Robert Whitman in December 1960.

Forti presented two works that evening: *Rollers* and *See-Saw*. The latter remarkably expresses how objects are never just inert entities, but carry potentialities that bypass their mere functionality, purpose, or instrumental value. In English, a see-saw names a toy made of a long, sturdy wooden plank balanced half-way on top of an axis that teeters up and down according to the weight of those sitting on each of its ends. The eight-foot-long plank used in Forti's piece was placed on top of a wooden sawhorse, and two people were asked to stand and walk back and forth on the oscillating plank: Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris. Always a poet, Forti played with the verbal oscillation in the object's name and added to the performance the involuntary dynamics of the blink: the lights in the Reuben Gallery were switched on and off at random intervals throughout the performance. See. Just seen. Saw. And see again. And not see again. This visual instability, of not quite seeing fully, or seeing without light, or having one's gaze cut against one's will, made it all hard to grasp.[6] While the banging of the plank against the hard floor and the mechanical sound of a toy attached to the plank that mimicked the mooing of a cow made it all expressively material, Morris and Rainer perhaps experienced, for the first time, being moved by things in the field of the choreographic. But despite all the efforts to extract the see-saw from its instrumental purpose, to make the two dancers standing on it be moved according to its never quite fully manageable movements, the fact remains that, because a see-saw is after all an *equipment*,[7] Forti's bachelor machine remained within the realm of the "object," which is to say that it was still bound to purposefully animated subjects, even if its teetering moves were already contributing to set up a crisis in the aesthetic identity of dance as a stable art form a few years before the emergence of the Judson Dance Theater. Despite Forti's daring proposition, despite her activation of hidden potentials in the object, the fact remained that neither the bodies nor the see-saw were being moved by some *thing*. There was too much control, too much self in control.

In 1961 Forti presented *See-Saw* again, as part of the *Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things* evening at Yoko Ono's loft in Chambers Street, New York City. While *See-Saw* was once again being performed by Rainer and Morris, indeed "some other thing," totally unannounced, barely perceptible, started to modestly stir at the edge of the performance space, behind the audience's backs, quietly. Not wanting "the

viewers to pay close attention" (Spivey 2009: 14), but simply to *sense* that some other *thing* might be going on, might be moving in the non-space of the non-work, a smaller version of Forti's dance construction *Huddle* was also taking place. This "dance construction" involves an anamorphic muddle of bodies that proceed to climb quietly over each other. The modesty, the amorphousness, the peripheral position, the penumbral location and the unannounced off-centeredness with which *Huddle* was performed during *See-Saw* that evening suggest that this largely forgotten element of that performance was the closest approach to a thingly dance that Forti offered that evening (Spivey 2009: 14).

The incipient movement of things continued to resonate, call, act upon the imaginations of postmodern dance and minimalist sculpture. It is significant that, after stepping down from Forti's see-saw plank, both Rainer and Morris would more or less at the same time begin to address the political-kinetic problematic that is at the heart of any desire to put things into motion, which is to say they both confronted the crucial tension between the fact that "some people want to run things, other things want to run."

In 1965, the year before Rainer first wrote of her desire for a self-less movement derived from a vague thing, Robert Morris announced the end of his career as a dance-maker when, as a kind of post-mortem, he published "Notes on Dance" in the pages of *The Tulane Drama Review*. In that essay, Morris describes the five works he considers to be his dances pieces: *Arizona* (1963), *21.3* (1964), *Site* (1964), *Check* (1964), and *Waterman Switch* (1965). In Morris' discussion of his dance works we can identify a desire that mirrors the first part of Harney and Moten's observation: the choreographic task, for Morris, was to set up conditions for *running things*. For him, choreography was a "self-perpetuating structural system" of composition and corporeal mobilization, where "chance" and a general propensity for certain subjects and certain objects to resist authorial intentions could be totally eliminated or at least dramatically reduced. As Morris writes, "by the uses of *objects that could be manipulated* I found a situation which *did not dominate my actions nor subvert my performance*" (Morris 1965: 180, emphasis added). Thus, without subversion of the object against authorial domination, choreography became for Morris a means of attaining a level of *manipulability* that could ensure that not even objects would be able to overtake the author's actions and intentions. For Morris, choreography as a self-moving structure of command became a technology for keeping a firm hold over matter, over bodies, and to make matter conform to the author's hand. *Not to incur the risk of having objects subvert* my *performance. Not to have* my *actions dominated by objects. Or: How to run things.* Soon this choreographic principle would seep into Morris' approach to sculpture. In "Notes on Sculpture, Part II" (1966) Morris' assertion of control becomes a first principle when he explicitly speaks of the necessity for "more control" in minimalist sculpture. "Concerns are now for more control" of the entire situation where the object is placed: "Control is necessary if the variables of

object, light, space, body, are to function" (Morris in Battcock 1968: 234). In control, Morris describes the dances he made between 1963 and 1965 as being explicitly under a regime of manipulability, or a kind of Heideggerian "equipamentality" (*Zuhandenheit*).[8] Thus even when Morris writes that what matters in minimalist sculpture is a "less self-important object," we cannot help but detect in his desire for diminishment yet another mode of initiating a counter movement that affirms (even if ironically) an ever *more important, transcendental artist-author*.

Against this project of increased authorial mastery and self-importance, Rainer's proposition remains radically provocative. Indeed, Rainer's affirmation could be rendered as something like this: "To move, or be moved by, *a radical exteriority*, which nevertheless calls and interpellates my interiority into a moving-towards-impossibility, or towards the highly improbable, or the unforeseen—already present, but still unexpressed, in potential, unhandled, beyond chance and control."[9] To be moved by an already present radical exteriority for the sake of the unrecognizable, and never by a matrix of over-determined intentions (even good ones): that is the challenge of moving as "some *thing*." This means that a "thing" is not ontologically or phenomenologically defined, determined, presumed. Nor is it necessarily bound to a specific object or commodity. Rather a thing emerges as a very specific, *apersonal element in the doing of an action*—perhaps akin to what Bruno Latour calls an "actant" (2005)—that may be performed by any kind of matter whatsoever: object, animal, plant, rock, even, indeed, the matter that gets called "human."

As we saw with the unforecasted meteorological dispersion of Arjona's bubbles, a thing acts from the bubbling zone of undetermined singularities, neither here nor there, and yet concerned with the here and now of the situation it summons and which it helps, in vagrant determination, to re-situate. A thing is less an object than a mode of actioning the absolutely unforeseen. Unexpected, unrecognizable, yet clearly there, it expresses its own extraneousness. The thing is determinate vagueness.

The choreographic and performative program that Rainer describes as the need to "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself," is also a way to provoke *objects* and *selves* to step out of their zones of conformity and alliance to the cliché that is humanity, to escape from the dyadic object–subject embrace that conforms and pre-forms both terms. Rainer's call dares us to let things be things, away from any other considerations of art, signature, subjectivity, or instrumentalization. But here also lies the paradox: the more we dare to let things be things, the less "heroic" we have to be. Imperceptibility and modesty are essential components for a declension towards thingliness.[10]

What could this daring thing be in dance, since invisibility, imperceptibility, and modesty all go against the consistent privileging of "presence" in Western theatrical dance? This privileging of presence seems to be predicated on a "powerful narcissistic capacity" (Gil 2009: 89), one that is historically

linked to concepts of the "personal" and the epideictic as being the most significant components of the dancer's subjectivity. As Mark Franko writes, "The dancer's own person is the ultimate and single object of praise and dispraise in the dance" (1986: 22). One consequence of such foundational and persistent conceptualizations of personhood and self-centeredness in dance: a blocking of the dancer's desire for, or towards, *things*—impeded as he or she is by the need to constantly affirm and reaffirm personhood and the self. From this perspective, "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself" perhaps might mean: dare to be vaguely moved by a radical exteriority that glimmers at the edge of perception (because unforeseen and unforeseeable) yet is fully sensed (because absolutely real), rather than by a judgment or a form.[11]

The notion of the impersonal—or *apersonal*—that can be expressed by, or through, the movement of things brings me to a final observation. In 1965 (the same year that Morris published "Notes on Dance," one year before Rainer wrote "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies," and five years after Forti created her dance for the see-sawing bachelor-machine), the Brazilian visual artist Hélio Oiticica jotted down his own observations on dance. Contrary to Morris' "rules or tasks" undertaken in order to achieve "more control," and unlike Rainer's desire to move and be moved by the means of "some *thing*" (which, in the end, still contained a hint of instrumentality, since it was about *making* a thing that would make someone move), Oiticica was interested in the impact of improvised dance on his sculptural work. He wrote that he understood dance as expressing "the immanence of the act" leading to a "new discovery of the image" (in Bishop 2006: 105). In significant contrast with Forti, Rainer, or Morris, Oiticica was not at all interested in theatrical choreography, or dance pieces performed in galleries, but rather in *samba*—along with all of its social, racial, corporeal, and political urban grounds.

For Oiticica dance was the putting into action of what for him was a necessary dissolution of the aesthetic *object*. This dissolution might then lead to unforeseen redefinitions of the authorial-artistic *subject*. Through the non-object of dancing, sculpture, and painting could escape from their objectality and thus become a "proposition for a new perceptual behavior, created through and in the ever increasing participation of the spectator, which in the end leads to the *overcoming of the object* as end of aesthetic expression" (Oiticica 1996 [1967]: 127). This new perceptual behavior, which Oiticica called "suprasensorial," was predicated on less subjectivity, less imposition, and less instrumentality. Note the difference from Morris: here it is not the control of the situation that matters, not the making of "objects that could be manipulated" so they do "not dominate" the author-dancer actions, but the overcoming altogether of the object–subject diad—in the direction of, and alongside, things.

Dancing became the overcoming, or rather the "transcreating," of the object.[12] In 1964, Oiticica began to use the expression "*transobjeto*" to

describe his artworks, which soon came to take the form of what he called the "*objectato*" (objectact). Oiticica would eventually reach the point where distinctions between objects and subjects became increasingly vague, blended into a zone of singular actions, of things acting their thingness. Moving along the limits of object and subject within the zone of the thing—which is not a boundary, but a site of frictional exchange, of extreme excorporations and incorporations, a vibrational and intense vital surface where all sorts of incompossible exchanges and interactions occur, the spacetime of phase changes, the event, the singularity—Oiticica came very close to what he called "thing":

> There is, as it were, an exploration of something unknown: "things" are found, which are seen everyday but which one never thought to look for. It is the search for oneself in the "thing"—a kind of communion with the environment (ah! how well dance achieves this!—the Mangueira rehearsal grounds [...]).
>
> (Oiticica 1996 [1967]: 105)

Dancing "badly" according to some art historians, which is precisely the point, since his dance was not about form, shape, or steps properly delivered, was not about "'new conditioning' for the participant, but the *destruction of all conditioning*" (1996 [1967]: 127) precipitated by dancing-as-thing; dancing alongside the poor and dark-skinned residents of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, Oiticica encountered a thing-limit in objects, in bodies, and in subjectivity.[13] He found a thing-force capable of opening life up to an experimental, unpredictable communion between thing and thing. In this communion, subjectivity is recast—as long as one does not make the mistake of "searching for oneself," and most importantly as long as one does not allow the figure and function of the artist to colonize the objects he or she makes under the influence of selfhood, personhood, authorial handling, or intentional manipulation. Instead, the quest for a renewed subjectivity is to get lost "in 'the thing'"—which Oiticica sees as just another word to describe a "communion" (or "unnatural participation," to use an expression from Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 240, 258) with the plane of matter. Final (trans)formulation of Rainer's call, via Oiticica: "move or be moved by some *daring* other than your heroic-transcendent artistic self."

A choreographic reaffirming: dance as some thing, forty years later

By the mid-2000s, i.e., by the time I was starting to develop the curatorial concepts for the two IN TRANSIT festivals, it had become clear that the concerns about the relations between movement, objects, and things expressed by certain experimental artists working between choreography and sculpture in the 1960s had begun to reemerge, once again. The reemergence of these

concerns validated Mario Perniola's observation that "To give oneself as a thing that feels and to take a thing that feels is the new radical experience that asserts itself on contemporary feeling" (2004: 1). In line with Perniola's assessment, a distinguishing trait of many works of experimental dance created between 2005 and 2011 was the noticeable presence of objects as significant performative elements, which in some cases even replaced human dancers. Curiously, the objects used in these works were quite often simply what Heidegger called "mere things" (1993: 147): ordinary accouterments of daily life, mostly insignificant, whose presence onstage did not seem to correspond to a renewed Duchampian interest in turning everyday objects into art works. On the contrary, the simple presence of these things on dance stages seemed aimed at bringing choreography down to the level of yet another "mere thing" in the world.

Between 2006 and 2010, the presence of mere things in choreography could be found almost everywhere. In German choreographer Thomas Lehmen's fifty-minute solo work *Schrottplatz* (Scrapyard) (2010), Lehmen talks to and interacts with a lamp, seven chairs, a microphone, a hammer, a tomato, and a newspaper, among other items, trying to explain to each object the function or nature of the object positioned next to it. The piece probes the limits of signification and displays how language bounces against the opaque surface of matter. Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero's group piece *We are going to miss everything we don't need* (2009) investigates what Mantero calls the "rebound effect" between an "object of the world" and the word that signifies it, exploring the ambiguous thingly movement between an object's sheer presence and its semantic resonances by considering the possibility of "touching the other side of things" (Mantero 2009). In the evening-length work *My Private Himalaya* (2009) by Amsterdam-based choreographer and visual artist Ibrahim Quraishi, seven performers interact with five hundred objects, including mannequins, lamps, a plastic rabbit, all sorts of medical paraphernalia, flowers (plastic and organic), a real-size replica of R2D2 from the *Star Wars* movies, different pieces of furniture (old and new), household cleaning products, glass bottles, bouncy-balls and a five-foot-tall bust of Aristotle. Nonhuman objects are also prominent in Brazilian choreographer Marcela Levi's *Em volta do buraco tudo é beira* (Around the whole everything is edge, 2009), and in several works by French choreographer Christian Rizzo, particularly *Christian Lacroix seen by ...* (2007–08) and *My Love* (2008). Objects are quite singularly present in Mette Ingvartsen's *Evaporated Landscapes* (2009), a piece without any human dancers that instead uses light effects, foam, soap bubbles, darkness, and sonic vibrations to choreograph a dissolution of forms that reveals how frequently the apt name for that which is vague and fugitive is indeed "*thing*."[14]

Of course, objects of various sorts have always been present on dance stages. Indeed, it is the history of this presence that has shaped the fruitful dialogue between dance and the visual arts over the past century, and

most significantly in the artistic movements and developments that took shape after World War II. As Rosalind Krauss notes in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*,

> a large number of postwar European and American sculptors became interested both in theater and in the extended experience of time which seemed part of the conventions of the stage. From this interest came some sculpture to be used as *props* in productions of dance and theater, some to function as *surrogate performers*, and some to act as the on-stage generators of scenic effects.
>
> (Krauss 1981: 204)

However, the recent redefinition of the status of the object in experimental choreography departs from the terms employed by Krauss in her discussions of the postwar uses of sculpture on dance stages. In all the works mentioned above, and in the three works I will consider more closely in what follows, choreographers are clearly not using sculpture created by visual artists, either as "generators of scenic effects," or as "surrogate performers." Instead, we find choreographers mostly *bringing stuff* onto stages and into rehearsal rooms and galleries in a way that is quite different from the postwar works described by Krauss. What we see in these recent pieces is that objects are picked up, brought into a place (stage, gallery, room) and then, most of the time, simply allowed to "be" alongside the dancers' bodies. But isn't the act of leaving an object be, of opting not to manipulate it as a "surrogate performer," and choosing not to affirm it as "art" or use it to create certain theatrical or choreographic "effects," already to provoke in the object a transformation? Isn't letting an object be already a move towards de-objectifying the object, a move that turns the object into a mere *thing*—if we understand that "a thing is neither an instrument, nor a utensil, nor a means" as Perniola, following Heidegger, reminds us (Perniola 2004: 109)?

If, as I suggested earlier, the concept of the object (as opposed to the concept of the thing) is ontologically linked to instrumentality, utility, usage, and means, it follows that objects exist in a symmetrical relationship to subjectivity. Indeed, objects in this account are "an endless reproduction and confirmation of the *manipulative abilities of the subject*," as Silvia Benso has remarked (Benso 2000: xxxiii). In dance, the figure of the "manipulative subject" is indelibly linked to the authoritative figure of the choreographer, and to his or her authorial function in dictating steps, controlling gestures, and directing dancers' movements in the minutest details. To control, to dictate, and then to be obeyed with precision: these are reasons why the choreographer William Forsythe once identified choreography as "an art of command" (Franko in Franco, Nordera, and Centre national de la danse (France) 2007: 16). Within this choreographic economy, the choreographer sees the dancer's subjectivity as always ready for manipulation, as a mere means or as an instrument for a single, transcendental author-artist who

wants to run things. It is in this sense that a dancer might be compared to an object: the dancer becomes merely a tool or a means that a choreographer uses to create a work.

If objects and subjects symmetrically co-determine one another in this way, it follows that "if the status of the object is profoundly changed, so also is that of the subject" (Deleuze 1993: 20). Viewed in this light, the renewed prominence of objects in recent choreography poses important questions about subjectivity in contemporaneity: once an object surrenders (or is deprived of) its utility, once it is removed from the realm of instrumentality, and from its subordination to the subject that manipulates it—in other words, *once an object becomes no longer an object but a thing*—then what does the subject relating to it become? Specifically, what does the subject who dances, the subject of dance, become? In the co-constitutive symmetry obtained between objects and subjects, the thing stirs up, breaks down, severs the bind subject–object, and both involute, shedding objecthood, shedding subjecthood, and move towards the mode of existence of *some thing*. But, if this is indeed the case, how does this involution actually perform its moves, in the realm of the choreoaesthetic as well as of the choreopolitical?

These questions are the reason why I have chosen to conclude this chapter by considering three works that pursue, and also inflect, the quest for a movement of some things, rather than selves: *Tickle the sleeping giant #9* (2009), by American choreographer Trajal Harrell, *Este corpo que me ocupa* (This body that occupies me, 2008), by Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro, and *Solo...?* (2008), by Spanish choreographer Aitana Cordero. In each of these pieces, the confusion between object and subject, between thing and object, and between subject and thing is mobilized so as to offer the dancer an occasion not to "move or be moved by some *thing*," (Rainer) but to give him- or herself as a thing among other things, as Perniola puts it. Harrell's *Tickle the sleeping giant #9* and Cordero's *Solo...?* were both presented in IN TRANSIT 2009, and my experience of their presentation in this context has shaped my discussions of these two works. Fiadeiro's *Este corpo que me ocupa* was not presented at IN TRANSIT 09, but its singular critique of the subject–object bind, which disrupts hegemonic models of subjectivity and objecthood by engaging with the movement of things, suggests a number of critical links between Harrell's and Cordero's respective propositions. Indeed, all three pieces reveal the ways choreography can clarify and express the intricate dynamics between subjectivity and objecthood in the contemporary moment: they show how choreography can activate and actualize, even if momentarily, the mutual movement of surrender towards the thing within the object and the giving of the self as thing by the subject.

Trajal Harrell, Tickle the sleeping giant #9 *(2009)*

On June 14, 2009, directly behind one of the walls of the large corridor where Maria José Arjona was in the midst performing her *White Series*, at

exactly 12:00 noon, six dancers in street clothes, five men and one woman, began to lie down on five thin, white, foam rectangles positioned on the cold stone floor of HKW's main foyer. They were about to start performing Trajal Harrell's *Tickle the sleeping giant* #9. All of the dancers had taken a dose of Ambien, a sedative-hypnotic prescription sleep aid.[15] In so doing, the piece's temporal duration, as well as its choreographic and gestural score, were no longer fully under the control of Harrell's or the dancers' will or consciousness. Instead, for the following eight hours, the piece would be composed entirely by the effects of the drug's a-subjective metabolic velocities, as each dancer's body interacted with Ambien's active hypnotic chemical ingredient Zolpidem tartrate, a class of imidazopyridine. That day, the six dancers had taken the drug a bit before noon. Unlike Arjona's piece, which was still ongoing in the space directly next to them, the timing of Harrell's work's ending was not exact, since it depended exclusively on how long the effects of imidazopyridine would last in each dancer's body.

In taking the drug, Harrell and the dancers defined and produced a thingly zone of action that operated according to ostensibly non-choreographic concerns regarding prescribed movement. If the subject who defines dance as an autonomous artistic discipline within the "aesthetic regime of the arts" (to use Jacques Rancière's expression) has traditionally been conceptualized according to a kinetic, disciplined "being-toward-movement" (to use Peter Sloterdijk's expression [2009: 6]), one that is always ready to perform at the slightest command of the choreographer-author, then once a dancer becomes incapable of fulfilling such a task, he or she risks losing all aesthetic "utility" and identity.[16] In other words, the dancer becomes a mere thing. But if the loss of kinetic proficiency within a choreographic system of obedience threatens the onto-aesthetic grounds of what is usually referred to as dance, it also opens up the possibility for thinking and performing movement otherwise. Instead of movement as macro-displacement, the work involves small perceptions: twitching, trembling, or turnings prompted by non-volitional, physiological, and largely unconscious forces. Rather than simple spectatorship, the piece requires its viewers to adopt a position of caring as a mode of being alongside unconscious bodies that have voluntarily—and, to be sure, temporarily—given up the capacity for intentional, conscious action.

Through the use of a common psychotropic drug, Harrell's work directly recalls what Paul Preciado has called "the pharmacopornographic control of subjectivity," which (Preciado argues) constitutes the current, hegemonic, "real stake of capitalism" (2013: 39). Yet *Tickle the sleeping giant* #9 produces a scene that in its formal modesty, lack of spectacularity, and evocation of a collective quietness that also involves a more general abandonment of the epideitic mode of dance, is very different from the aesthetic practices and forms of subjectivity produced by pharmacopornographic capitalism, whose "raw materials" Preciado describes as "excitation, erection, ejaculation, and pleasure and feelings of self-satisfaction, omnipotent control, and total destruction" (39). Nothing further from the affective atmosphere

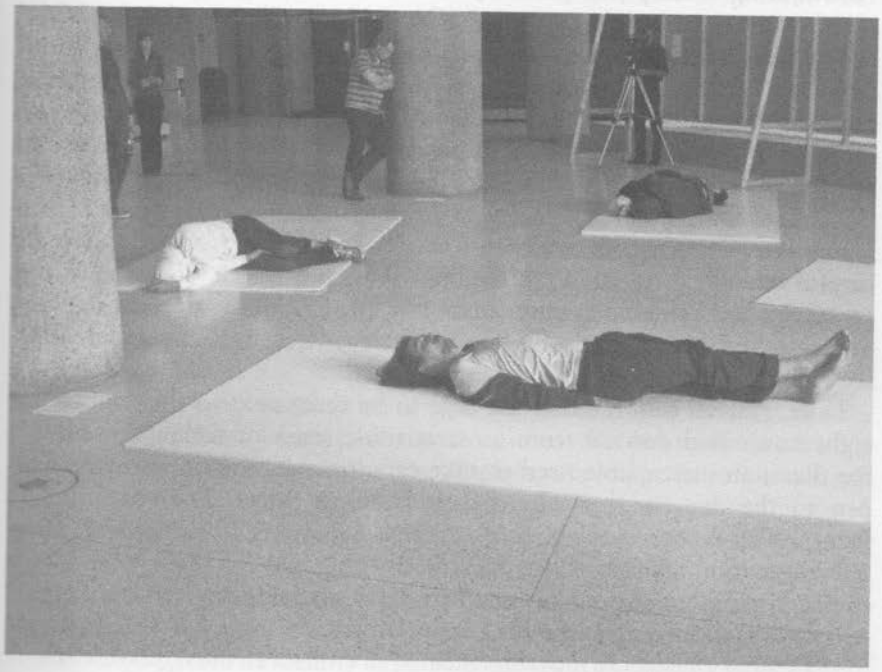

Figure 1.2 Trajal Harrell. *Tickle the sleeping giant #9*. IN TRANSIT Festival, HKW, 2009. Photo: David Bergé. Courtesy of the artist.

created by this piece could be imagined: there was no excitation of audiences and performers, no omnipotent control over the work, no climax leading to rousing applause.

On the contrary, one of the rather amazing effects of the quiet, thingly nature of this work as it was performed at HKW is that not only spectatorship, but choreographic authorship, were replaced by a kind of performance of resistance that was indeed quite close to the resistance of the object that emerges from a declension towards a thing that feels. The mode of this resistance was the public display of actual sleep. Russian philosopher Alexei Penzin writes that cognitive capitalism involves a total usurpation of sleep. Since sleep is considered "an act of non-communication and non-productivity," it has become "a powerful form of exodus from a society, which is based on communication and production." This is why, despite the apparent passivity, Penzin defends that certain acts of sleep (or sleep-acts) can and should be considered as forms of "political mobilization" (2013: 239). Withdrawing from the infernal, inter-hyper-active-gregariousness of the relation between subjects and their objects, trapped in "the uninterrupted functioning, or vigilance of power" that is introjected not only as self-control but as a kind of self-vigilantism, as an obligation to be awake, thus reproducing

"the injuring of sleep [that] is inseparable from the ongoing dismantling of social protections in other spheres" (Crary 2013; 18), "the sleeping body" becomes a "minimal experience of isolation, separation, potentialization" (Penzin 2013: 238). Given that "sleep is an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism" (Crary 2013: 10) *Tickle the sleeping giant #9* is less an expression of pharmacopornographic capitalism than a resistant activation of sleep's potential towards the collective calling of a thing that feels.

In this experiment, sleeping bodies exude an irresistible force that calls for careful attending. At HKW, throughout the whole piece, discreetly sitting on some chair behind a column a few feet away from the sleeping dancers, definitely "off-frame" but still there, alongside, quiet, unassuming, insisting, we would find Trajal Harrell. Attending.

Later, Harrell told me that his urge to be there next to the dancers for eight hours had derived from an irresistible sense of feeling responsible for them; an inescapable need to take care, to ensure nothing would happen to the dancers throughout their slumber. Why? One reason came from a well-known side effect of Ambien. According to the Federal Drug Administration, its side effects include the potential for those who take it to unconsciously perform gestures, behaviors, and movements—even highly social ones. According to the FDA website,

> AMBIEN may cause serious side effects, including:
>
> After taking AMBIEN, *you may get up out of bed while not being fully awake and do an activity that you do not know you are doing*. The next morning, you may not remember that you did anything during the night. [...] Reported activities include:
>
> - driving a car ("sleep-driving")
> - making and eating food
> - talking on the phone
> - having sex
> - sleep-walking (FDA website, accessed September 3, 2015)

According to the FDA, taking Ambien might cause movements to erupt in a kind of automatism that has the potential to create a dangerous situation.

Another reason for Harrell's desire to keep watch over the whole performance arose from the fact that, in previous iterations of the piece, some audience members expecting a dance would start to poke the dancers, or to drag and try to move them, make them do something, wake them up, have them perform. Harrell's impulse to care had nothing to do with authorial oversight, then, nothing to do with the desire to represent the author's zone of influence, or zone of control in order to prevent object or subject "subversions." It had everything to do with an ethical imperative of caring. This made Harrell less a choreographer than an attendant. Here, the attendant

is not to be understood in the sense that Deleuze gives the term in his book on Francis Bacon's paintings, *The logic of sensation*: "an *attendant* is not a spectator but part of the Figure," "a constant, or point of reference in relation to which a variation is assessed" (Deleuze 2003: 14). Unlike Deleuze's account of the attendant, Harrell's presence does not belong to the regime of the "Figure" since his discreet, off-frame presence during the performance of his piece never allows him to become a "point of reference" in the work's overall plane of composition. Instead, Harrell's unassuming yet determined, attending care suggests the politics of erotics that Perniola identifies in the mode of being of "a thing that feels":

> The discovery of the essence of things goes hand in hand with the dismissal of any desire and individual cupidity. Therefore when I give myself as thing, I do not mean at all to offer myself to the exploitation and the benefit of others. I do not offer myself to the other but to the impersonal movement that at the same time displaces the other from himself and allows him in turn to give himself as thing and to take me as thing.
>
> (2004: 109)

Harrell keeps watch. In doing so, he is not at all "the *I* that keeps watch in the night, but the night that keeps watch inside the *I*, dismissing it from its role as subject, from its identity as person, and from its capacity to be a site of imputation" (Esposito 2011: 129). In keeping watch of inner night, and thus eradicating the "legal dogmatism that equates humanity and personhood with a status bequeathed or revoked by juridical sovereignty" (Weheliye 2014: 131) the choreopolitical links between thing, darkness, freedom, and a certain nonperformance are now rearticulated vividly with blackness—an explicit concern in all of Harrell's choreographic *oeuvre*.[17]

If earlier we saw how Robert Morris created structures so that neither objects nor dancers could "subvert" his authorial intentions, here, in this irresistible drive to take care, we see the direct expression of how "we are called by the things *as* things" (Heidegger 1968: 8). We answer the call of things by giving ourselves to their call as the things we (also) are. Ethical vigilance, caring, attending, all result from this call and response. Most importantly, this caring vigilance can only occur when representation collapses: "the first step towards this vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents" (Heidegger 1971: 179). This expresses exactly what I witnessed in Harrell's modest, almost embarrassed, but absolutely and resolutely determined vigilance for those eight hours. Hidden from view, he simply took care: of the dancers and therefore of the work, of their sleep and therefore of their work. Their work that refused both productivity and agitated passivity. Significantly, the ethics of this "vigilance cannot be a voluntaristic—that is, a subjectivistic—shift of attitude, which would, once again, abandon things to the power of arbitrariness of the good will, or lack thereof, of the human agent" (Benso 2000: 122). This is the political event

that the performance precipitates: the ambiguous ontological status that sleep confers upon the performers[18] actually rescues our waking time away from circuits of agitation, production, circulation, gregarious consumption, control and self-control; it transforms the process of spectatorship into a kind of vigil, and the process of keeping vigil into another kind of life and labor. The force of this ethical call and response becomes, like the imidazopyridine occupying and interacting with the non-personal elements in each dancer's bodies, a thing that does not make one move, but assembles dance into a process of giving oneself away as thing answering to things.

João Fiadeiro, Este corpo que me ocupa *(2008)*

At the beginning of *Este corpo que me ocupa* (This body that occupies me), Fiadeiro walks onto the blackbox stage from the audience, where he has been sitting, crosses it, opens a door on the stage's back wall, and brings in a vase holding a tall plant. With care, he places the vase lying down on the stage, a bit off-center, and returns to sit with the audience again. Time passes. On the stage, the plant and the vase execute a beautiful solo for living creature, inert matter and imperceptible motion. An object-event.[19] After a while, Fiadeiro gets up again from his chair, and methodically, never hurrying, proceeds to bring more objects into the scene: three more tall plants in vases, a sofa, a small four-wheel cart, an armchair, an electric lamp, a metal stool, a large cathode-tube television set, a white wooden stool. He places all the objects in ways that are either unusual or explicitly non-utilitarian: he places the cart, the sofa, and the armchair upside down, the plants and the unplugged lamp lying down sideways, and the TV set remains unplugged, with its screen facing the floor. He aligns these objects in several parallel diagonals, filling up the stage in a precise composition. Finally, Fiadeiro himself lies on the floor, face down, removes his glasses (which he also places on the floor, just another thing among things), and aligns himself alongside all that stuff. Nothing happens, for minutes. The event is unfolding.

Este corpo que me ocupa reinforces but also adds another dimension to the concept of alongsidedness understood as an erotics and a politics of giving oneself as some thing. Its title offers a crucial insight into the ways objects and subjects co-determine each other. As far as mere matter is concerned, the question of knowing which body occupies another, the question that titles Fiadeiro's piece, remains a matter for physics or chemistry. However, in the field of subjectivation and instrumental reason, the question of being occupied and possessed by bodies and by objects is *the* crucial affective-political question. As Moten observes, "While subjectivity is defined by the subject's possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by a dispossessive force objects exert such that the subject seems to be possessed—infused, deformed—by the object it possesses" (Moten 2003: 1).

The second half of *Este corpo que me ocupa* clearly demonstrates this dynamic of self-possession predicated on possessing an object that

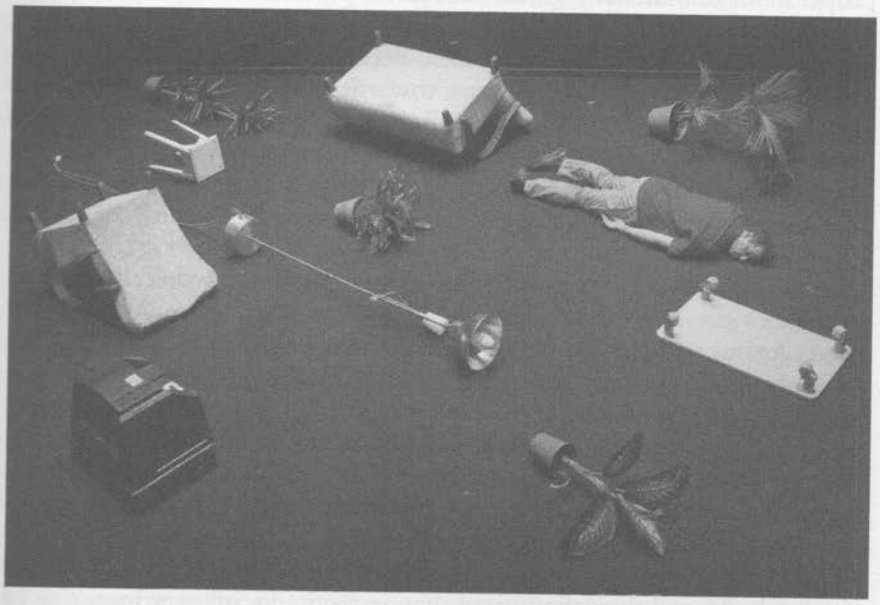

Figure 1.3 João Fiadeiro. *Este corpo que me ocupa*. 2008. Photo: Patrícia Almeida. Courtesy of the artist.

nevertheless ends up taking possession of subjectivity itself. After proposing a non-instrumental scattering of objects, and after tarrying along with them on a shared horizontal plane, Fiadeiro performs a choreographed re-organization of the objects according to their putative "proper" use and assigned functionality. Restoring each object's instrumental mode of being (sofa and stools right-side up; TV and lamp in their properly functional positions, plugged into a power outlet, and turned on; vases and their plants standing vertically), Fiadeiro creates the image of a well-furnished, generic urban living room. Then, with a self-contained energy, he assumes the position of the contemporary subject regarding those possessions that both possess and distort him: he slouches on the couch to enjoy his object-oriented domesticity. In this properly set-up world, where dysfunctional objects have been put back into their functional positions to perform their utilitarian purposes (a chair to sit on, a plant to decorate, a lamp to illuminate the scene, a small table to place a TV set, and a plugged-in TV to entertain), we see a whole system of objects invading, taking possession, and prescribing their function at the very core of subjectivity. We witness the systematicity of this system that choreographs to the minutest details (including desire itself) the subject who is supposedly controlling the system. Possessed by the objects he is supposed to possess, Fiadeiro becomes a "proper" subject only at the moment he starts using objects in a "proper" way. In this

proper mode of mutual usage, an unbearable portrait of contemporary passivity emerges thanks to the figure of the solitary man sitting on a couch, before a TV set, surrounded by tamed, decorative nature. This scene, this image, held for several long minutes towards the end of the piece, generates an affective effect that is not at all the same as the one obtained when Fiadeiro had been lying alongside the matter of the world in the first part of the piece. What emerges instead is the realization that "immersed in the object of enjoyment, the enjoyer is conditioned by what is enjoyed" (Benso 2000: 53).

At this moment of realization, *Este corpo que me ocupa* recalls Giorgio Agamben's critique of the object in his essay "What Is an Apparatus?" There, Agamben describes the object in contemporaneity as nothing other than an overwhelmingly pervasive system of command, literally choreographing gestures, affects, and behaviors. Naming the commanding object "apparatus," he writes: "I shall call an apparatus literally *anything* that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings" (2009: 14). Oddly powerful, this "any*thing*" endowed with the capacity to capture, to model, and to control *gestures* and *behaviors* matches quite well the definition of that aesthetic-disciplinary invention of modernity, choreography, which can be understood precisely as an apparatus for capturing gestures, mobility, dispositions, body types, bodily intentions and inclinations, for the sake of a spectacular display of the body's presence.[20] As Agamben lists apparatuses, it becomes clear that his conception of the term entails a very concrete and specific understanding of apparatus as an *object that commands*:

> Not only therefore prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones [...]. (14)

Between pens and cigarettes, computers and cellular telephones, the sheer number of objects controlling and commanding our gestures and habits, our desires and movements, is limited only by their availability in the world—particularly in "the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live," characterized by "a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses" (15). As we produce objects, we produce nothing other than apparatuses that subjugate and diminish our capacity to produce non-subjugated subjectivities. As we produce objects, we find ourselves being produced by objects: "today there is not even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modeled, contaminated, or controlled by some apparatus" (15).

Since objects seem to be governing our subjectivity, seem to be subjecting us, under their apparatus-function, Agamben's definition of apparatus helps us understand the concern with objects in recent choreography. His notion uncovers a performativity in objects, and identifies a choreographic force defining and inhabiting objects in contemporaneity—a force securing the relation between subjectivity and objectivity as it mediates the question of obedience, of governing gestures, of determining who determines whose movements.

But perhaps there is more to apparatuses than control.

Agamben hints that underlying the force of the apparatus (prison or pen, religion or cigarette, agriculture or cell phone) a "desubjectifying moment is certainly implicit" (20). The pressing question then is: how does one desubjectify an apparatus, and most particularly, an object? Agamben's answer is "profanation," or what he calls the "counter-apparatus." For Agamben, profanation is the only action that might lead to restoring "the thing to the free use of men" (18). Yet it sounds very odd to reinstate the category of "man" as a counter-apparatus, as a political-aesthetic move—just as it is strange to celebrate and prioritize returning the thing to the subjugation to *men*'s usage. A solo piece by Spanish choreographer Aitana Cordero may indicate a way out of these capturing, controlling, and persistently masculinist understandings not only of a subject, but of apparatuses and counter-apparatuses, one that proceeds without invoking the category of "man" and the need for more instrumental subjection of the thing for men and to use.

Aitana Cordero, Solo...? *(2008)*

Karl Marx famously noted that if human activity in general is capable of enacting *corporeal transformations* of matter by turning it into objects of usage—for instance, by turning a block of wood into a table—under the specific parameters of capitalism, human activity makes objects endure a supplementary, magical, or incorporeal transformation, one that turns anything made for the use of humans into "a very strange thing" called a commodity (Marx 1981: 163). Guy Debord remarks that, in this peculiar mode of transformation, "we have the principle of commodity fetishism" corresponding to the control of the commodity over all aspects of life, including the distribution of the perceptible and imperceptible in life (1994: 29). Debord took this principle of domination and used it to define our "society of the spectacle," which is not really a society made of performances, but one where "the spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which *the commodity completes its colonization of social life*. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see; *the world we see is the world of the commodity*" (29, emphasis added).

The political destiny of the commodity is, then, to complete its total dominance over social, perceptual, and affective life—including the life of things. Indeed, the commodity dominates not only the world of things (by

turning them into instruments of profit, or use, or exchange), but also the realm of what is deemed to be perceptible, what remains imperceptible (or irrelevant), the realm of the sensible and of the infra-sensible, the domain of desiring, the domain of dreams. The commodity governs even the very possibility of *imagining governance*. At least, this is its impetus. Under its domain, humans and things find their shared openness to endless potentiality violently crushed or diminished. Even if the commodity is a material *object*, its power is to make sure that neither persons nor things are left in peace, simply let be. In this way, we can see the link between Agamben's "apparatus" and Marx's "commodity." But what kind of act, gesture, or movement can one perform against such dominance? If Agamben proposed "profanation," Aitana Cordero's *Solo...?* proposes something else: revolt.

Cordero's *Solo...?* (2008) is an evening-length work in which the choreographer brings to the stage a variety of domestic objects: a television set, electronic appliances, buckets, fans, electrical wires, chairs, stools, sound systems, lamps, shovels, irrigation systems, desktop and laptop computers, among many other tools, gadgets, and instruments. As the solo progresses, the affective atmosphere changes, depending on how Cordero handles each object. In the beginning, it seems as if the piece is almost an exercise in creating a display or archive of everyday paraphernalia. For several minutes, Cordero matter-of-factly brings an object onto the stage, one at a time, and places it on the floor, thus gradually creating a visually balanced composition through the use of various colors, textures, dimensions. As objects start to fill the stage and saturate the possibilities of display, Cordero begins—slowly at first, then more intensely—to randomly attack the objects, stomping on them, throwing them against each other, against the walls or against the floor, finding ways to destroy each one as much as possible. The violence is quite real. Shards of plastic, pieces of metal, bits of glass, fly everywhere. After a while, Cordero proceeds to carefully pile up all that stuff, broken or intact, in one spot. Using white duct tape to draw on the floor a straight line leading from one side of the stage to the pile of trashed, useless objects, Cordero then gets on all fours and, as any dancer should, follows the white line with care, as if it was a choreographic notation. As she ever more gently, ever more carefully, ever more sensually, crawls towards the pile, the lights in the theater slowly dim to full blackout. Carefully, even caringly, as darkness looms, Cordero pushes her body into the pile of destroyed stuff, these no longer useful objects. We hear her effort, and the sounds of things adjusting to that other presence among them. Yielding to one another, less a body among objects, and more a thing among things, a fusion, a confusion, a compossibility is performed. A post-Fordist version of Simone Forti's 1960 *Huddle*: most of the dancers piling up are broken things. As darkness grows the piece ends in tranquility, despite, or perhaps because of, the preceding violence performed against objects, which now, no longer useful, are simply let be. Here, we do not find a "profanation" of the object that returns "the thing to the free use of man" (as Agamben would have it), but a violent revolt, performed by a woman against

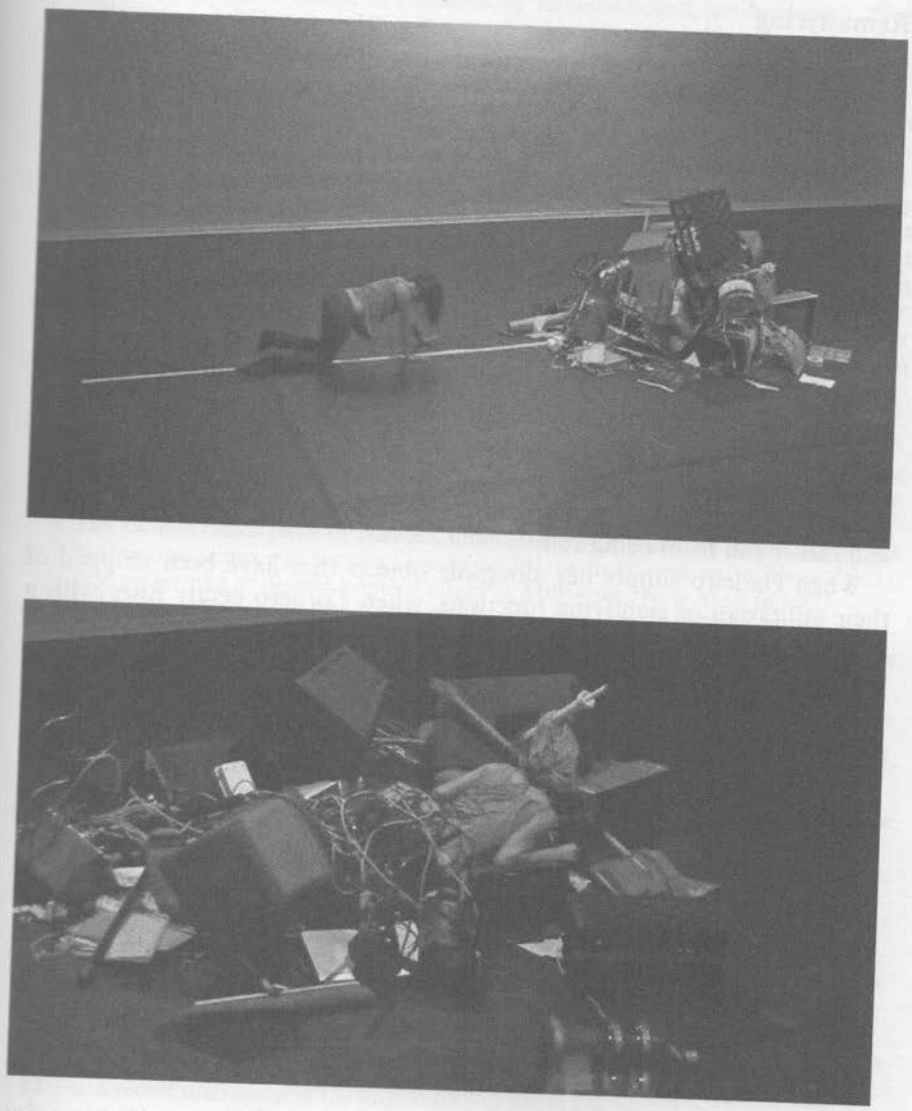

Figure 1.4 Aitana Cordero. *Solo...?* Photo stills from a video by Filip Molski. Courtesy of the artist.

the domination of things and subjectivity by the gripping force of that colonizing apparatus known as the commodity. Unlike the pieces I discussed by Harrell and Fiadeiro above, *Solo...?* introduces a very direct link between revolt and revolution, where violence emerges not as destructive force, but as the necessary action to break apart the bind between subjects and objects, in order to reveal a shared mode of being thing, moving as thing.

Rematterring

The paradox of any thingly investment in creating art lies on the fact that even as a work proposes modes of becoming-thing, the work itself remains, obviously, an art *object*. This is the inescapable limit that thingliness places to all representation: it lies at the threshold of objectivity, just as it defines the outer border of subjectivity. And yet the choreographic investments in thingliness expressed by the works discussed in this chapter reveal why this particular paradox need not be a dead-end or source of blockage, but might instead be capable of energizing the links between art and politics, subjectivity and objecthood, thingly performances and their effects. Indeed, the *disbanding* of representation proposed by the thing may be finally, if only briefly, be glimpsed, experienced, or enacted within the regime of expectations that representation itself invokes—a regime that is immediately subverted by dancers who are not made to move by some instrumentalized equipment but that give themselves as things, a regime undermined by things that refuse to be merely producers of effects or proxies for human bodies, and rather run from being run.

When Fiadeiro simply lies alongside objects that have been stripped of their utilitarian or signifying functions, when Cordero gently fuses with a pile of destroyed commodities, and when Harrell watches over a dancer's drugged body sleeping in the museum as a mode of being alongside in an "ethics of things," hegemonic binds between objecthoood and subjectivity are shaken for a moment. In this tremor, a gap or opening in the field of possibilizations is revealed and actualized. This activation is nothing else than the political effect that a choreographic critique of the object can create: the formation of an "impersonal movement that at the same time displaces the other from himself and allows him in his turn to give himself as thing and to take me as thing" (Perniola 2004: 109). And why is it that this briefest of glimpses matters? Because by daring to approach the movement of things, by heeding their call, choreography rematters materiality itself, the very matter of how we access our relation to all the other others in the world. The fundamental point in moving as some thing is to always remember that "some want to run things, some things want to run." As bubbles often do, no matter how much we forecast their movements.

Notes

1 The IN TRANSIT festival originated in 2002 when Johannes Odenthal invited the Singaporean theater director Ong Keng Sen to collaboratively create an international festival of live performance that would rethink notions of contemporary transcultural and postcolonial artistic expressions. As the curator of the 2008 and 2009 editions of the festival, I was extremely fortunate to work closely with dramaturge Silke Bake. She and I shared and discussed every single idea, work, concept, artist, space, text, and texture of the two festivals.

2 "We do not ask concerning a thing of some species but after the thingness of a thing. For the condition of being a thing, which conditions the thing as a thing,

cannot itself be a thing, i.e., something un-conditioned (*un-bedingtes*). With the question 'What is a Thing?' we are asking for something unconditioned" (Heidegger 1968: 8–9).

3 The exact date that Rainer wrote the essay has proven to be a bit uncertain. In Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, a footnote preceding Rainer's essay states that it was written in 1966. At the end of the essay another note affirms, "This article was written before the final version of TMiaM had been made. (Mat, Stairs, and Film are not discussed)" (in Banes 1987: 55–56). However, in a July 2012 email exchange Rainer wrote to me that "I believe 'A Quasi Survey ...' must have been written that summer [of 1966], certainly *after* the first performance of *Trio A* ('The Mind Is a Muscle, Part I') in Jan. 1966 *and* the 40-minute version of *TMIaM* in May 1966." In the same exchange, Rainer even considered the possibility of having written it in early 1967. Given the note in Banes' book, Rainer finally determined that 1966 was the most likely date, as she wrote to me in an email: "It's quite likely I was writing it at the same time as Morris was working on his 'Notes ...'." Yet since these would be Morris' "Notes on Sculpture," the first of which was published in *Artforum* in February 1966, the second in October 1966, and the last installment in the summer of 1967, the exact timing of Rainer's writing remains indeterminate. Which, given the incoherent motion of things discussed in this chapter, is actually quite fitting.

4 The earliest dance piece by Merce Cunningham with music by John Cage to use chance operations was *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* (1951), first performed at Bennet Junior College in Millbrook, New York in 1951.

5 In her essay, Rainer acknowledges that her "early dances (1960–62)" used improvisation and "chance procedures," which she had found to be unsatisfactory by the time she came to create *Trio A* (66).

6 For a longer discussion of choreography and seeing without light, see Chapter 2.

7 "The kind of Being which equipment possesses [...] we call 'readiness-to-hand,' that is, at hand, at manual disposition, manipulable" (Heidegger and Stambaugh 1996: 87).

8 In Heidegger, *Zunhandene* qualify a set of entities that are "ready to hand." See also footnote 7.

9 On the unpredictable presence of potentiality, see Massumi (2010), who suggests that "Potential is how the unforeseen is already present" (276).

10 Another possible term for this mode of declension would be "creative involution," a concept offered by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 238–239).

11 "Matter and form are in no case original determinations of the thingness of mere things," writes Heidegger and Krell (1993: 154).

12 This expression ("*transcriação*" in Portuguese) comes from one of Oiticica's privileged interlocutors and friends, the Brazilian concrete poet and critic Haroldo de Campos. For a discussion of the term see (Jackson 2010, Lepecki 2012b).

13 For a recent discussion of the importance of life in the favelas in Oiticia's life, art, and writing, see (Salomão 2015).

14 Reflecting and refracting this recent choreographic concern with things and objects, we find a parallel interest in reassessing the nature of objects and things in fields as varied as black studies (Moten 2003), political theory (Daston 2004, Brown 2003, 2004), continental philosophy (Benso 2000, Harman 2002 and 2005, Shaviro 2014), literary studies (Johnson 2008), queer theory (Ahmed 2006), sociology (Latour 2005), cultural anthropology (Miller 2005), and philosophy of art (Bennett 2010). This critical-aesthetic conjunction reveals a general intellect of our contemporaneity, while reminding us that "the object" is not an intellectual property of "object-oriented ontology." Indeed its problematics may have found more interesting, acute, and potent expressions in performance and choreography.

15 Ambien is the brand name of one of the most frequently prescribed sleep-inducing medications in the US, Zoldipem. Between 2006 and 2011, 30 million prescriptions had been written for Zoldipem in the US. One of its well-known side effects is somnambulism, which explains its street-name, "Zombie-pill."
16 I discuss choreography and Sloterdijk's notion of "being-towards-movement" at greater length in the first and second chapters of *Exhausting Dance* (Lepecki 2006).
17 For a discussion on darkness, blackness, and freedom see Chapter 2.
18 On the ambiguity that sleep confers upon the ontological status of things, plants, animals, and humans and how Western metaphysic's notions of consciousness and self-presence cannot solve this ambiguity see (Derrida 2008: 146–149).
19 On objects as events see Hacker (1982), for whom "reference to an object at a time or over a period of time is in fact reference to a kind of event, which might be denominated 'an object-event' " (4). See also Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, where he writes: "The new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold [...] but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of from. [...] The object [...] becomes an event" (1993: 19).
20 For a longer discussion of choreography as apparatus of capture, see (Lepecki 2007).

2 In the dark

All of a sudden, or perhaps after a slow fade out: lights out. Or almost out. Dimly lit, barely visible, dance stops giving something to view. Or does it? Could it be rather that dance opts to give something other than its habitual image to view and offer the eye another kind of vision, another substance for its appearing? Instead of movement sequences, poses, gestures, bodies, faces, limbs, images, scenes, actions, and objects stepping to presence within a field of light, here we are—in a pitch-black space, or a thick penumbra. We might be attending *Fade out* (2005) by Swiss choreographer David Weber-Krebs, *Preview* (2007) by Romanian choreographer Manuel Pelmus, *Speculations* (2011) by the Danish Mette Ingvartsen, *Untitled* (2005/2014) or *Low Pieces* (2009–11) by the French Xavier Le Roy, *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* (Suddenly everywhere is black with people, 2012) by the Brazilian Marcelo Evelin, *This Variation* (2013) by the German Tino Seghal, or *No Title* (2014) by the Norwegian Mette Edvardsen—to mention just a few of the recent works of choreography in which, despite many differences in style and genealogy, we either find the entirety of the performance unfolding in darkness or experience significantly long moments in the dark.

In his book *Seeing Dark Things: the Philosophy of Shadows*, the philosopher Roy A. Sorensen notes that darkness should not be perceived as a lack of vision, but as another kind of vision. As he emphatically writes, "in pitch darkness, we at least see the darkness" (2008: 240). Turning momentarily away from the field of light as the dominant and transcendent foundation of representation and of visual perception, and more particularly turning away from light's domination over dance's self-presentation as the art of representing moving, or even non-moving, but certainly always visible, always (re)viewable bodies, we also find ourselves immediately distanced from the world of *possibles*. As Gilles Deleuze suggests in an intriguing passage in "The Exhausted," his famous text about Samuel Beckett's later theater, "beyond the possible there is only darkness" (1997: 170).

But since, in Deleuze's philosophy, to be beyond the possible is to find oneself freed from the limited combinatory restrictions such a world entails, this darkness beyond becomes another name for full potentiality, and therefore,

as we will see, another name for freedom. As Magdalena Wisniowska explains, for Deleuze, "the realization of the possible in everyday is limited to the choices that we might make and the aims we might follow" (2014: 415). Given that, in our control societies of endemically and spectacularly optical capitalism, the possible is ever more confined to predictable, foreseeable, and forecasted "choices" for our actions and desires, in such a way that the possible "*precedes* our perceptions, our actions, our thoughts, our statements, as if the future contained in advance all the possible" (Lapoujade 2014: 252, translation mine, emphasis added), then any attempts to escape from the possible, to go beyond it, are not to be taken lightly. Such attempts also inevitably ask for, or bring about, a certain darkness.

And this is intriguing.

Why is it so crucial to affirm that beyond the limitations of the possible we find not another concept waiting—for instance, the impossible—but instead a very specific perceptual-affective-chromatic realm, "only darkness"? Why does darkness emerge not as the opposite, or negative side, of the possible; why is it not to be understood as the impossible, but rather as *something altogether different*: as full potentiality? This is intriguing: darkness names a realm, or a zone, beyond the combinatorial of possibles and their pre-established pre-givens. A zone where the pre-given, the pre-assigned, the pre-formed is countered by another force, potentiality, which is said to emerge only when we are beyond the reach of light—or at least once "*the light does not come any longer from a metaphysical foundation* that disperses it from its sunny heights, nor does it come from a transcendental subject that projects it onto the world as if from an electric lamp on his forehead," as David Lapoujade notes about Deleuze's critique of possibility (2014: 283, translation mine). This is intriguing: full potentiality, in other words, darkness *as such*, is such a rare and powerful event (and therefore so urgently in need to be produced, activated, practiced in our societies of control, where transcendent illumination is introjected as enlightened self-control), that Deleuze even gave it another name, one that resonates with the political dimension it invokes: freedom. Indeed, in his famous and obscure essay[1] on Beckett, Deleuze defines darkness as both *exhaustion of the possible* and as *freedom*. "Something is seen or heard," he writes, only inasmuch as "it is freed from the chains by which it was bound" (1997: 158). Deleuze links this perceptual freeing (which is also a freeing of signification into other logics of sense) to "the singular darkness" found in Beckett's later theater and television works, but already expressed in his novel *Murphy* (1938), from which Deleuze extracts the following passage, making sure there are no questions left about what this darkness truly is: "in the dark … of … absolute freedom" (1997: 210).[2]

Thus, all of a sudden, or after a slow fade out, we find ourselves not only attending dances in the dark but confronted by a meaningful series of conceptual, philosophical, and political equivalences: potentiality <–> darkness <–> freedom. Each informs the other in the choreographies discussed in this

chapter. These particular philosophical, critical, and political correspondences allow us to understand choreographic uses of darkness as a means by which a some*thing* else can be brought into visibility, audibility, and sensation because some *thing* has been set free, choreographically, from the reified photosphere that, onto-historically, has bound dance's coming into view as an illuminated (or enlightened) image.

This is, admittedly, a counter-intuitive operation, one that goes against certain tenets of the dominant Western political, philosophical, and aesthetic imaginations, which have so persistently participated in this love for and of light. Everyday language expresses this metaphysical–perceptual link: we need to "clarify" issues; we need to "enlighten" readers; we need to "bring truth to light." Jacques Derrida notes how "the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics" is the opposition of "darkness and light," understood as the opposition between "self-revelation and self-concealment." Derrida concludes, "the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light" (Derrida 1978: 31). This dialectics of self-revelation as siding with light, or as being in itself light (with all its associated images of clarity, enlightenment, etc.), and of self-concealment as siding intimately with darkness or being itself darkness (with the associated images of obscurity, falsity, etc.) are especially central to one of the most influential accounts of such philosophical-political projects, Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Crucial element in their argument is the deep relation between the necessity to rescue enlightenment from its fall into what they call "obscurantism" and what they saw as the political-philosophical need to *dis-enchant the world*, a kind of dispelling of the reveries of reason, which they saw as dangerously siding with the obscure, what belongs to, or lurks in, the dark. As they write: "Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge" (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Gunzelin 2002: 1).[3] One disenchants the world by illuminating it with instrumental reason.

Hence, the photo-logics of the dialectical series of couplets shadow/light, reason/enchantment, darkness/enlightenment, are foundational not only to Western metaphysics more broadly, as Derrida demonstrates, but to modernity, and to twentieth-century critical theory, which expresses—but also continuously reproduces—a generalized (and as we will see in a moment, deeply racialized) *photo-political-aesthetic unconscious*. But, as the choreographies in the dark discussed in this chapter propose, light as metaphor for knowledge and freedom actually does not clarify anything, nor does it free anyone; it mostly *obfuscates* and *entraps*. Mostly, it whitewashes the world.[4]

Seventy years after Adorno and Hockheimer were working on their manuscript, Jonathan Crary, in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, makes a diagnosis of our current condition of global capitalism as a state of "permanent illumination" (Crary 2013: 5). In this capture of subjectivity by increased luminosity and clear visibility, power dominates by enacting

what Crary calls a "fraudulent brightness" (2013: 19). In a reversal of Deleuze's proposal, in *Difference and Repetition*, that "the eye binds light, it is itself bound light" (1994: 96), the synchronous operations of biopolitical power and globalized capital are now capturing light in advance of perception. Before even reaching the eye, light is trapped, financialized, tamed, and only then released to the eye/subject through a relentless (and ideally inescapable) 24/7 circuitry of massive photonic integration—fueled by bits of information zooming as increasingly more tamed photons. The result: "hundreds of millions of individuals precipitously began spending many hours a day and night sitting, more or less stationary, in close proximity with flickering, light-emitting objects" (Crary 2013: 80). And what does all this choreography of tamed, utilitarian, light produce? Crary's answer is the same as the one Horkheimer and Adorno used to describe the great feat of enlightenment: disenchantment.

> A 24/7 world is a *disenchanted* one in its eradication of shadows and obscurity and of alternate temporalities. It is a world identical to itself, a world with the shallowest of pasts, and thus in principle without specters. But the homogeneity of the present is an effect of the fraudulent brightness that presumes to extend everywhere and to preempt any mystery or unknowability.
>
> (Crary 2013: 19, emphasis added).

The hypothesis I will be pursuing in this chapter is the following: what if dance could be seen in the dark as non-enlightened, non-fraudulently illuminated image of freedom? In the following pages I will address how the fast or slow fading-out or switching off of lamps, projectors, and emergency-exit signs undertaken by the different choreographers discussed in this chapter might be viewed as particularly timely choreopolitical acts—acts that go beyond a mere aesthetic play with visual perception, but that indeed open up, through darkness, and build, as darkness, a much needed space of potentiality for our times of constrained (possible) choices.[5] Before proceeding, however, one final element in the series of equivalences between darkness, potentiality, freedom: the inevitable invocation, as powerfully suggested by art historian Darby English, that to be in the dark, somehow, is also to be with a certain notion of racial blackness.

In *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, English makes the case that one can only see a work of art in total darkness "when darkness forms the condition of the work's visibility" (2010: 1). But he soon associates the condition of visibility of darkness in contemporary aesthetics with the problematic of what he calls the "black representational field" (2010: passim). English finds this field to be intrinsically associated to "a kind of tactical segregation" of the lived experience of black life (2010: 11). The political-aesthetic question one draws from English's approach thus becomes: why would darkness, the absence of light, necessarily relate in

current artistic imagination to racial blackness and to black aesthetics? The answer lies in the ways blackness has been conceived and described by enlightenment as a kind of racial-aesthetic entanglement that perturbs, if not totally undermines, the very possibility of aesthetic judgment and even of reason itself.

In this sense, enlightenment names both the production and the end-product of a semantic-existential field, an epidermal-political boundary, whose rationality, presented to the world as "pure reason," is animated and delimited by the endless tautological motions of a metonymic back-and-forth slide between blackness, darkness, and irrationality. Enlightenment is the name of such a racist (yet, always "well-meaning") motor fueled by streams of dominant white light. Its prized mode of subjectivity privileges an aesthetic project stuck in the vicious circuitries of rationalized (and even "reasonable") exclusion. Such self-reinforced circuitry reproduces enlightenment's constitutive black racism, famously expressed in Immanuel Kant's association, in *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), between black peoples, the black color, and the categories of "ugliness" and "stupidity" (Kant 2011 [1764]: 110–111). Fred Moten pushes further the problems caused by blackness to enlightenment's aesthetic judgment and pure reason when he identifies the "Kantian ambivalence toward the tumultuous derangements that emerge from imagination" (2008: 203). Imagination is a kind of blackness of reason, its unruly or savage motion, reasoning's blackout (we saw already, with Deleuze's notion of darkness–freedom–potentiality, how darkness beckons unbridled imagination). Thus, enlightenment's constitutive photophilia, its whitewashing of the world as reified photologics of reason, reveals an aesthetic-racist unconscious sustaining a whole political formation that abhors (racial) blackness as (civilizational) darkness and (reason's) derangement.

Given this series of equivalencies, what I will propose in this chapter is the following: starting with analyses of dance works in the dark, I will advance towards the proposition, which I draw mostly from the work of Fred Moten, that blackness (and a certain darkness with which blackness is associated) is an affective-chromatic singularity, often attached to experiences of radical dispossession, which are constitutive of modernity and contemporary capitalism, and that opens aesthetically and politically *onto* the ever flowing *meaning* of *things* and not into the fixed signification of objects and their subjects. As Moten writes, blackness is less a fixed identity category than it is an onto-political force of disruption: "The lived experience of blackness is, among other things, a constant demand for an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence, a para-ontology whose comportment will have been (toward) the ontic or existential field of things and events" (Moten 2008: 187; see also Harney and Moten 2013: 47–57). Or, in Michelle M. Wright's words, "*in any moment in which we are reading/analyzing blackness, we should assume that the valences will likely vary from those of a previous moment*" (Wright 2015: 20). This is why blackness

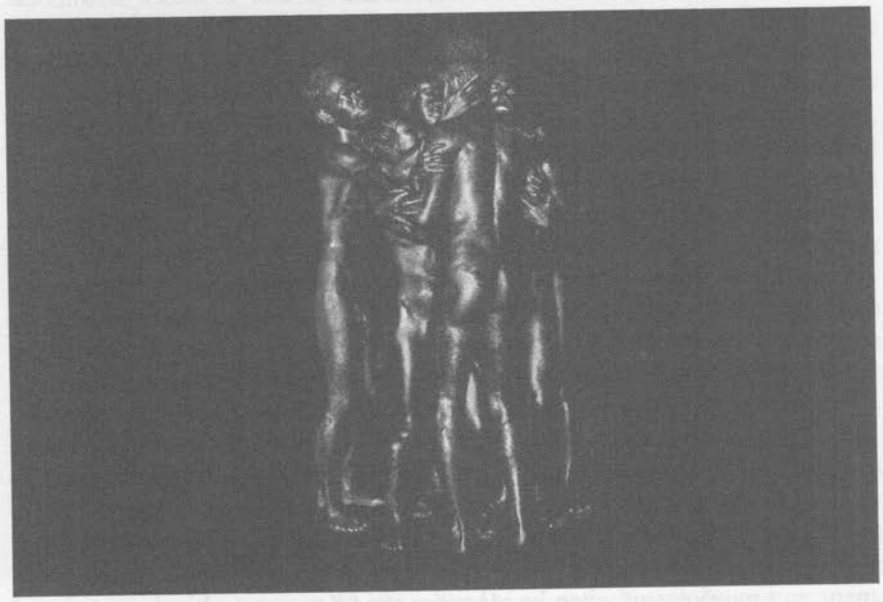

Figure 2.1 Marcelo Evelin. *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*. 2011. Photo: Sérgio Caddah. Courtesy of the artist.

is already disruptive choreography: even the laws of its physics are in constant state of re-differentiation. Even its zone of brilliance is already disruptive both of the photologics of presence and of the disenchanted world of reason.

The recent dances in the dark that I will be considering in this chapter reveal the desire to disrupt the insidious work of a certain biopolitics of luminosity and a certain geopolitics of (semiotic and aesthetic) clarity. The link between darkness and blackness in English's and Moten's (very different) theoretical approaches allow us to affirm that reifying (aesthetic-semiotic) clarity is just another side of the same old racist politics of neocolonial (aesthetic-racial) enlightenment. Against the colonizing drive contained by this politics of luminosity, Moten's onto-political notion of blackness suggests that the situation is not so much one of an absolute struggle of light against darkness—even though perhaps, and at a certain level, it must remain a struggle of blackness against whiteness. Rather, it is more about how to find through blackness, through the black politics of dark things, a "light that does not illuminate, clarify, anything [...] because it remains within itself" (Lapoujade 2014: 282–283, translation mine). It is about how to make a minor or black light, by immanently assembling the political potentiality of darkness as freedom against what Didi-Huberman

calls "the ferocious light of power" (2009: 77, translation mine). This black light does not fix what it touches as a clear image, and does not hover from above in order to discern, explain, and correct; it does not distribute only the combinations of possibles, and does not turn everything under its field of action (men, women, children, love, sex, animals, matters, dance) into utility. This black light offers, instead, visions of life in the zone of freedom created by the darkening of vision. In this zone, unexpectedly, subjectivity may discover, surprisingly joyfully, and yet perhaps also terrifyingly, that to be in darkness is *also* to be with blackness.

I will concentrate on four works that, in different ways, underscore darkness' singularity as a choreopolitical force, and that affirm and activate darkness as a singular substance for experimenting with, and imagining how, one might exist and live beyond the constraints of the merely possible. By intimately linking collective experiences of darkness to unruly potentialities of imagination and speculation (as in Mette Edvardsen's works *No Title*, Mette Ingvartsen's *Speculations*, and Manuel Pelmus' *Preview*), and by connecting darkness with the onto-political force of racial blackness (as in Marcelo Evelin's *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*) I want to advance the proposition that choreographic operations in the dark allow us to perform "the anticipation of the re-legislation of appearing in the world," as Patricia Reed has recently described the poetic-political task of speculative imagination (2013: 84), a task I believe is already dark movement, reminding us of Foucault's understanding that "to imagine is [...] to intend oneself as a movement of freedom which makes itself world and finally anchors itself in this world as its destiny" (Foucault and Binswanger 1993: 68).

# # #

The activation of darkness as a critical-speculative element that redefines the photological foundations of choreography is the central singularity in Mette Edvardsen's solo *No Title* (2014). With her eyes shut since the beginning of the piece, Edvardsen moves about an empty stage that will be increasingly enveloped in darkness. About sixteen minutes into the piece, a quick fade out takes place, which will somehow align the audience's sense of vision with Edvardsen's. This happens just after Edvardsen has announced, in the briefest and yet most unequivocal way, that choreography—understood as a structured organization for the displacement of identifiable bodies moving between fixed points distributed in fixed space—is now simply *gone*. She utters, matter-of-factly:

B—gone
A—gone
going from B to A is gone
C ... gone ...

What could be called, after Stefano Harney, logistical choreography—the efficient moving of subjects *qua* objects among pre-given points, from B to A to C—is announced to be gone. That announcement is soon followed by pitch-black darkness. Moving about in space while delivering a long litany whose refrain is the (quite Beckettian) word "gone," Edvardsen proceeds to link the erasure of logistical choreography with the end of theater as a representational machine of fantastically lit, fantastically illusionary images. She continues her litany, the stress in each verse falling hard on the word "gone" (which after a while starts sounding like an ongoing gong, determining the pace and irreversibility of each announced erasure), as the darkness around us in the theater quickly increases:

> visions are gone
> image is gone
> outlines are gone
> colours are gone

And, now, in total blackout, even the theater's emergency exit lights switched off:

> reflections are gone
> emission is gone
> warmth is gone
> orientation is gone
> direction is gone
> the front is gone
> hokus-pokus—gone

Sitting in total darkness (it will last for about three and a half minutes) we sense that the emission of warmth from the lamps above is slowly dissipating, just as our sense of orientation also starts to break down. The "Ganzfeld effect" produced by visual exposure to absolutely homogeneous fields of color takes over both our optical perception and our spatial proprioception.[6] Offering a theory of what he calls "total vision," Brian Massumi discusses how "the Ganzfeld experiments produced a visual experience of the visually unexperienceable: a self-abstraction of vision" (2002: 147).[7] Massumi's account of total vision is the opposite of a *totalitarian* vision: it is rather vision as immanent becoming, full visual potentiality. One of the results of this self-abstraction is a sense of utter disorientation, since space becomes itself again, a multiplicity detached from any exterior coordinates that make it striated, orientated, and subordinate to pre-given perceptual-symbolic grids.

The total darkness in the mid-section of *No Title*—so difficult to obtain in theaters today, since all sorts of security lights must remain on, in a logic of securitization whose "unintended" *aesthetic* effects (i.e., to make

it impossible to attain a true blackout) reveals a very determined *policed* affect—namely, that above all, and particularly above the promise of darkness the name "black box" entails, everyone (dancers, audience, choreographic work) must remain "secured," be made safe, be put into safety, and assured by permanently lit marks that someone somewhere is vigilant and policing vigilance. This predominance of securitization through safety lights must be understood precisely as the expression of a critique of a reified political-perceptual prohibition where light, representation, safety (including semiotic safety), and control all fuse to create an illuminated-enlightened situation as the only "reasonable" situation for a theatrical or choreographic experience.

In order to leave no doubt of the scope and intent of her critique, Edvardsen linguistically amplifies this total darkness by telling us how our sense of the dissipation of orientation is isomorphic to the dissipation of all sorts of photological illusions produced by theatrical performance. In this sense, *No Title* enacts not only Massumi's "self-abstraction of vision" but also Edvardsen's self-abstraction of theater as *theasthai*. As Edvardsen tells us: "hokus-pokus—gone." Theatrical illusion, the face-to-face between representation and perception created by the lit proscenium, by a light-function that is exactly the metaphysical foundation clarifying the relations between meaning, perception, and the sense of going from A to B to C, have all been swallowed whole by the pitch-black environment. Gone into another state of being, or into another realm beyond all the possible stagings already (pre)determined by the lit stage, however innumerous these determinations might be. Set free. Gone going. And this ongoing series of *gone* is tremendously liberating; this dissolution into the darkness lying beyond the realization of possibles, this entering into phase-space,[8] this linguistic-visual-kinetic-proprioceptive disorientating passing to the other side of the singularity precipitated by pitch-black darkness, where "you make people float out of their bodies and lose themselves, literally lose their *selves*" (Massumi 2002: 145, emphasis added). As Edvardsen writes in her program notes:

> With the piece *No Title* I start out where my last piece ended. In *Black* [2013], I made invisible objects appear by naming them and placing them in space. Having been obsessed with what is here, I now look into what is not as a way of activating and producing thoughts and imagination. Once you leave behind what is not, the perspective *opens to all there is* instead.
>
> (Edvardsen, program notes, 2014: n.p., emphasis added)

By activating directionless thoughts and aimless imaginations in and through the dark, by inducing a kind of dissolution of individualized boundaries in the bodies of its spectators, by entering into the directionless dark space of full potentiality, where perspective opens to encompass—without pre-given

direction or transcendent orientation—"*all there is*" (in Deleuzian terms, the plane of immanence, or nature, or the plane of consistency of desire, even of choreographic, choreopolitical desires) Edvardsen performs, physically, verbally, and visually, a new "No Manifesto" for a dance in the age of control. The only thing that we must keep in mind is that *No Title*'s apparent "no to light" is rather an affirmative "*yes to darkness*."

The simple operation of activating darkness in its positivity enacts a profound re-imagining of dance's onto-historical relations to the production of images, and to the ways dance reproduces its own (aesthetic) self-image. Choreographies in total darkness trouble the way in which dance's aesthetic autonomy has been both imagined and reified as ontologically subordinated to a pre-existing, and indeed transcendent, field of light. Within the history of aesthetic modernism, the subordination of dance to light was perhaps most famously expressed by Stéphane Mallarmé, when he proposed that, in the theater, one entity takes precedence (literally) above the dancer, the actor, or the musicians: the chandelier (*le lustre*). Because it lights the theater from above, the chandelier is for Mallarmé the transcendent and authoritative principle organizing the entire field of appearances under its domain. Because it brings representation to light while apparently not belonging to representation itself, the chandelier reaffirms the theater in its most etymologically originary way, i.e., as *theasthai*—a photological machine in which bodies come into being and presence (and aesthetic and choreographic value, relevance, contour) only inasmuch as they enter into view. For Mallarmé, the dancer in particular not just appears—she steps into ontological presence thanks to the field of visibility defined and ruled by the transcendent light of the chandelier. By coming into presence through the lit field that both precedes her and defines her as object, it follows that the dancer should partake of light's metaphysical principle by also becoming a light-being, a being not only for light, but of light: lit, alighted, irradiating, weightless.[9] In the modernist photo-technological enframing of dance within the irradiating luminosity of its transcendent field of presence, a dancing body becomes nothing more (and certainly never nothing less) than a lit image aiming to be a lit being. No light, no visible body image, no dance.[10]

This is why choreographic re-imagining must take place, exactly, in the dark, making the dark into a new kind of image. In the dark, images remain choreographic but must be understood now as *movements of thought*: a thought freed from the limitations of what it means to think, and a choreography freed from the limitations of what it means to make a dance. Like Deleuze's description of a dark space of freedom in Beckett, Edvardsen's *No Title* offers images, including an image of dance, that are "not a representation of an object but a movement in the world of the mind" (Deleuze 1997: 169).

But this world of the mind is not to be reduced to, or confused with, the world of intellection. It is rather the absolutely open world of a mind fusing intuition and duration, the world of the dark singularity where,

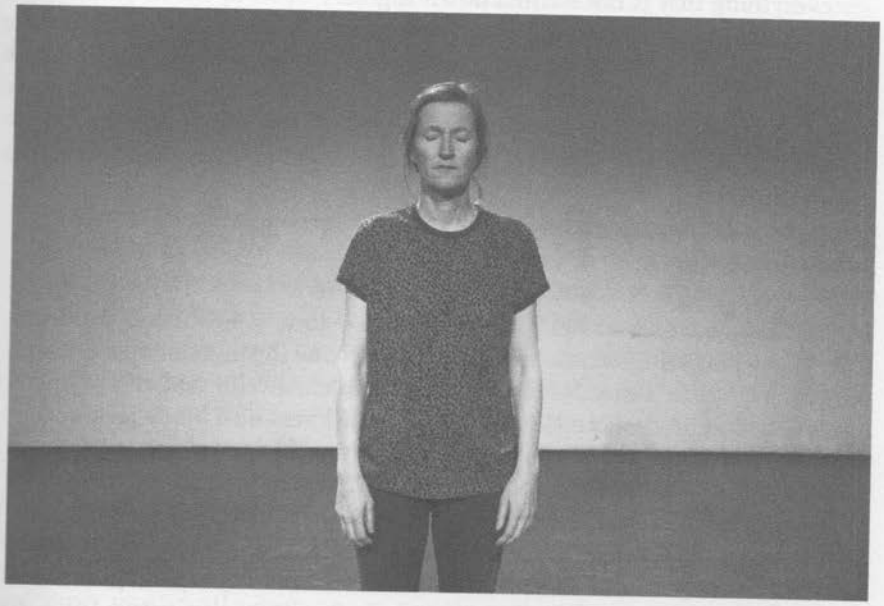

Figure 2.2 Mette Edvardsen performing *No Title*. 2014. Photo: Arya Dil. Courtesy of the artist.

within its event-horizon, one experiences "the fusion of dark and mind" (Wisniowska 2014: 427).[11] In this fusion, it is not so much that one becomes a person, or an individual, endowed with free will, but rather one finds oneself as an impersonal, anindividual-elemental particle suspended in an all-encompassing, total space of freedom: dark-space-freedom. This is exactly what is expressed in Beckett's sentence on darkness and freedom in *Murphy* but from which Deleuze only quoted the very last words. Beckett's full sentence reads: "Here he was not free, but *a mote in the dark of absolute freedom*" (Beckett 2006: 70, emphasis added).[12] Edvardsen, eyes shut, choreographically doubling the occlusion of light as metaphysical and physical ground for theatrical dance, seems to agree. As she concludes her piece, facing her audience, matter-of-factly, she tells us more of this phase-space where objects, subjects, all sorts of human affairs are all *gone*:

samples are gone
Khrushchev's shoe is gone
Schrödinger's cat—gone
The elephant is gone
E.T. is gone
"*Now is the winter of our discontent …*" is gone
For example—gone

everything that is not written down is gone
everything that is written down is gone

time is gone
the edges are gone
there is only inside, the outside is gone

illusion is gone
there is only outside, the outside is gone
darkness—gone

In the last two words of *No Title* ("darkness—gone"), Edvardsen advances something that will become increasingly relevant throughout this chapter, particularly when I discuss the work of Marcelo Evelin and the political, historical, and aesthetic relations between darkness and blackness, and as I introduce Fred Moten's notion of blackness as fugitive thing (see Moten 2003, 2008, and Harney and Moten 2013). Resonating with Moten's propositions, Edvardsen advances the notion that even darkness must be gone from itself, must always escape from itself and into other dark conceptions and other conceptions of darkness. In its uncompromising fugitivity, darkness remains true to its determinate power, to its persistent dissipative force, to its reality as potentiality and freedom, and thus might resist being fixed as yet another transcendent principle of further judgment and further conformity. It might resist being used as a vehicle for the multiplication of (always clear, always foreseen) possibilities, resist being yet one more element for more prisoning of life "away from these dark senses" (Harney and Moten 2013: 79).

# # #

In *No Title*, the choreographic logic of the resistance of these dark senses is intimately bound to the link Edvardsen forges between language, movement, embodiment, the closing of the eyes, the penumbral and, at a certain moment, total darkness. In 2011, Danish choreographer Mette Ingvartsen premiered a solo work titled *Speculations*, where dark senses, and the switching off of lights, were also positively activated and linked to language, speculation, and imagination. A powerful and crucial moment of darkness also takes place in *Speculations*. Indeed, the piece's title helps us further understand the choreologics binding darkness to the imaginative-speculative, and indicates something about the politics of such an alliance.

In this thirty-minute long piece, Ingvartsen enacts what she has been calling a practice of "procumentation"—or "proactive documentation."[13] The piece unfolds as a kind of storytelling, but of a very particular kind. Ingvartsen links her imaginative-speculative activation of the image by speech to an expanded notion of choreography, one in which she reenacts not only the past but also reenacts virtual futures within the disorientating

temporality of the present. This disorientation is already the work of a certain dark sense, a black spell, or black speculation that not only moves her during the performance, but moves her audience as well. This dark sense also moves entire dimensions of the historical, the fictional, the imaginative, the actual, and the virtual. As Ingvartsen writes, to use language in order to activate an imaginative dimension in dance is to give

> shape to another form of *extended choreography* namely: language- or word-choreography. It is in this extended space, beyond the body of the performer but also beyond the walls of the theater that language-choreography allows a link to the virtual to be made. It allows movement to be disembodied from the body of the dancer or performer, and it understands movement as something that is produced in the space between words, places, temporalities and between different forms of reality.
>
> (2014: n.p.)

In *Speculations*, we can sense this choreographic activation of storytelling, of the movement of images of speech, as soon as we step into the performance space, lights still on. As the audience enters directly onto the stage, Ingvartsen welcomes us and asks everyone to remain within the stage area.[14] Once all the spectators have arrived, she looks around and begins to speak: "You have just entered into the space through the back door of the theater. The room we are in is about six times bigger than this one and it's at least ten or twelve meters to the ceiling. The walls are of different color than this one, the walls are black ...."

Here, a constative utterance ("You have just entered into the space through the back door of the theater") is immediately transformed through Ingvartsen's speech act into an imaginative-speculative indetermination—since the constative is followed by the meticulous description of a room that does not coincide at all with the one we are (actually) in, but which nevertheless we are told we have (also) just entered (virtually). We have all just entered into a common stage space only to be told that the room we find ourselves in is bigger, higher, and darker than the room we are supposedly in at that moment. There we are: split already in (at least) two presents—one present-space belonging to the world of the possible where things are realized, and another present-space belonging to the world of the virtual, of potentiality, where things are on the cusp of being actualized, the theater with black walls.[15] What matters is that both spaces and both presents are absolutely real ("'Potential' and 'virtual' are not at all in opposition to 'real,'" Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 99). What is different between them are their constitutive matters that Ingvartsen's "language-choreography" rearranges once it decides to "re-legislate" speculatively-imaginatively their appearing in the world and thus the appearing of a world (to again invoke Patricia Reed).

Ingvartsen continues to move about and talk almost without interruption—opening space as she cuts through those standing around

her, but also delimiting space by aggregating the audience around her thanks to the ongoing storytelling. Her narration is warm, very detailed, and familiar, recounting so many different scenes, so many situations, so many actual and fictional performances. Soon we begin to realize that this other room we have just been told we are also (virtually) in is in fact not one, but many other rooms, and sometimes other spaces: a desert, a desolate seaside, an open field in a storm. Sometimes, the nature of these other spaces remains uncertain, other times they are explicitly described as being a scene from a film, a performance, or a section of a book. Several of these spaces and situations remain without referent, and yet seem vaguely familiar. They are there, the space is lit, we do not see them, and yet we sense. What matters is that these images and stories aggregate as so many very specific, minutely, and vividly described "'levels of nothingness' [...] an interesting way of describing the beginnings of differentiation in the indeterminate" (Massumi 2002: 146).

Differentiating in the indeterminate is a good way to describe how Ingvartsen, the choreographer-dancer-storyteller, tells us, by pointing into precise areas of the empty stage floor, about nine naked dancers covering themselves with a thick layer of silver or metallic paint. Differentiating in the indeterminate is a good way to describe how she asks each of us to find another person in the audience who we feel comfortable with, and to imagine this person naked, also covering him-or herself with metallic paint (we can choose the color we prefer, as long as it's metallic, she tells us). Or, in a sudden temporal twist, differentiating in the indeterminate is a good way to describe how she tells us that our situation "is very different from one that took place in the 1960s," but it may nevertheless remind us of this other performance with naked people, this time around all beautiful young women that have just walked through the door (Ingvartsen points to a door in the stage area we are in) bringing in buckets filled with thick blue paint and now starting to rub their bodies with it, just as a string orchestra begins playing a monotone composition (Ingvartsen sings this high note for a few beats), and now the naked women are walking towards one of the walls and pressing their bodies against large paper sheets (Ingvartsen presses her own body against the back wall of the theater for a few seconds in silence). Between the actions of historically unlocatable, naked, silver-metallic bodies and the direct reference to Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* of 1960–62, both real in their being virtual, we realize that not only space is at least triply split (past, present, future), but time is also in a warp: our present is the future anterior of a speculative event.[16]

> *Speculations* contains descriptions of scenes that I was literally wanting to do with a group of performers, producing an imaginary performance using ekphrasis as an approach to language. But it also contains descriptions of things that would be *absolutely impossible to realize on a stage* or in a theater and in that way opening up the choreographic structure

> to the outside world—*the dimensions of social or political connectedness that the thinking suggests*. These "outside world" descriptions are for instance of newspaper images of post-tsunami landscapes, that get processed to a point where they are no longer contextually recognizable, but rather creating a post-apocalyptic landscape in the horizon of the spectators' imagination. (The actual world outside turns into another type of outside world: that of the virtual).
>
> (Ingvartsen 2014: n.p.)

The virtual here reveals its political force: it is not only potentiality and freedom, as we saw before, but for Ingvartsen it is a modality of engaging with "dimensions of social and political *connectedness*" unavailable in the limited world of possible realizations. It is a connectedness that Ingvartsen will soon, first, link to shared aurality, and then, second, activate through a literal darkness that she will explicitly align with speculative imagination and determined vagueness. Both the first and second processes are necessarily affirmed as choreography, but they are modes of choreography determined by non-locatable-subjects and non-locatable-objects. We can call then these elements, dark things.

> *Speculations* never existed as a written down text, it only existed in the practice of speaking it. *It was made by applying certain movement strategies on to speech*, insisting on the oral, narrative quality of the words *rather than a literary or theatrical use of language*.
>
> (Ingvartsen 2014: n.p.)

There is a beautiful moment halfway through *Speculations* when darkness slowly creeps into the theatrical space in order to activate the movement and singularity of things. As in Edvardsen's *No Title*, this operation happens through a fade out, but unlike *No Title*, in *Speculations* the fade out is rather extremely slow, at first almost imperceptible. As it begins, Ingvartsen is sitting alongside her audience, in the bleachers, where she has just guided us to sit. As darkness begins to take hold, we are all facing the empty stage. As the penumbra creeps in, it proceeds to first dissolve the stage's hard edges, then the edges of those next to us, and then, as total darkness always does, our own edges. Within the dissolving of discernable shapes ushered in by the waning light, Ingvartsen continues addressing us in her warm, relaxed, and yet precise and slightly impersonal way—with only a tinge of artificiality due to the fact that she must project her voice (there is no sound amplification in the piece) so we can all stay with her story, stay with the movements of thought activated by her language-choreography. This time around, her stories function like those layers of thick paint she earlier described covering (virtual) dancers' and (actual) audience's skin: in the pitch-black darkness that finally arrives, Ingvartsen's stories and voice turn bodies and space into a saturated monochrome.

In this black monochrome the images she offers, "independent of all specifics, are not objects [...] but processes"—as Magdalena Wisniowska paraphrases Deleuze (Wisniowska 2014: 419; Deleuze 1997: 159). Speculative processes. Here, the word speculation, so linked to the semantic field of luminosity (from the Latin *speculum*, or mirror) gains a singular specificity. For Ingvartsen, it is not only a matter of speculating in the dark, but of a dark speculation, an anti-spectacle. There is reflection—this is undeniable. But this reflexive black reflection in the dark operates in precisely the ways that modernist aesthetics, in its purest mythology, has denied blackness to operate: precisely as reflexive substance. In his extraordinary, dizzying essay "The Case of Blackness," Fred Moten discusses a non-dialogue that took place in the late 1960s between the painter Max Reinhardt and the musician Cecil Taylor. Reinhardt, famous for his "black paintings," is drawn to a roundtable with Taylor and others to debate questions of blackness, aesthetics, and freedom. At a certain point, in his fierce denial of black being a color, and then of art as being an activity at all related or remotely influenced by social or political forces, Reinhardt affirms that he dislikes "glossy black" and prefers matte black. The former "reflects all the necessarily social activity that's going on in a room" (Reinhardt in Moten 2008: 194). Here is Moten's commentary on Reinhardt's dismissal of a black that not only reflects, but that reflects in particular the "necessary social activity in the room" and, therefore, reflects upon the social-spatial conditions of its presentation:

> The reflective quality of the color black—as well as the capacity of the black to reflect—have, of course, been introduced by Taylor. [...] Glossy black disturbs in its reflective quality. "It reflects all the necessarily social activity that's going on in a room." [Says Reinhardt.] But this is also to say that glossy black's reflection of the irreducibly social is problematic precisely because it disrupts the solipsism of genuine intellectual reflection that painting is supposed to provide. Glossy black denies the individual viewer's absorption into a painting that will have then begun to function also as a mirror [...].
>
> (2008: 194)

Something similar might be at work in the darkness in *Speculations*. Though neither glossy nor matte, this darkness is "the reflective quality of the color black—as well as the capacity of the black to reflect" and appears precisely as a black mirror, "a subverted object, the black mirror is also the object of all subversions, past, present and to come, the catalyst of all sorts of transgressions, and it is so even today" (Maillet 2004: 74). In his history of the black mirror, an optical device against which the entire photologics of aesthetic enlightenment marshaled its forces, Arnaud Maillet writes that "the black mirror is guilty of 'dirtying' colors and 'obscuring' light; that is its crime" (148). In the black reflexivity of her *Speculations* Ingvartsen sutures in the dark vaguely precise words of catastrophe and affect, of capitalist

apocalypse and the dejection of those left dry by its aftermath, and thus turns the entire situation to one where one cannot but reflect on "the necessarily social activity that's going on in a room." But since Ingvartsen has already suggested to us that those activities going on in the room socialize us with what is not visibly there (but is nevertheless still present), the black mirroring of *Speculations* reflects not self-images of what appears before us as lit figures, but the underground forces of obscure social conditions and their respective unseen political and social imaginaries. This is why Ingvartsen must also turn *Speculations* into a language-choreography *in the dark*. This allows her to activate collective imaginative realms that nevertheless remain separate from photological imperatives and necessarily confuse the rightful order of present, future, and past. In this confusion, things begin to move.

In the darkness of *Speculations*, as we in the audience fuse into a collective without a face, without boundaries or limits, Ingvartsen describes anespecific non-objects, just as she tells stories about non-specific non-subjects. She describes both non-objects and non-subjects, narrating scenes that, not by chance, are full of powerful images of destruction, destitution, natural disasters which soon become racial-political ones (the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for instance) portending catastrophe. These images are *non-utilitarian*: they evoke all sorts of stuff, and all sorts of beings, but are not at the service of prescribed functions, assigned significations, identifiable identities, or premade explanations.

This is how Ingvartsen describes the emergence of non-objects and non-subjects. Seated in the fading light, she tells us we are in a place surrounded by a vague noise that "Sounds more or less like *this*." With the word "*this*" Ingvartsen raises both hands and starts wiggling her fingers. She smiles and lets the silence fill the space, continuing to make the gesture for a few long seconds. Listening to this fluttering, virtual noise through the silent motions of her fingers, as the light continues its slow fade, Ingvartsen next tells us that the sound first starts "like rain drops" and increases until it becomes "as loud as hammers." Then, all of a sudden, she continues, the hammering abruptly stops, leaving a "kind of silence behind." She stops talking. By now we have been immersed in total, profound darkness for a few moments. Time passes, or perhaps, space thickens, as silence coagulates darkness into black substance. After a moment, she proceeds:

> Out of this silence appears a landscape and it is not an entirely natural landscape, it's a kind of landscape that is made out of millions of little pieces that are lying glittering in the sun. They all have different shapes and textures but what unites them is that they are so small, they are broken down to such small units that it is impossible to say what they were before they got splintered. I mean they are exactly the opposite of a clear object that has a clear function and utility like a glass that asks you to drink, or a chair that somehow invites you to sit down or a book that you know you'll still read. It's much more that kind of object that

> you have absolutely no idea what to do with, like an object that doesn't tell you where it comes from, which culture it belongs to, or which social function it might have. But more like the kind of object you think about whether you should throw out for a very long time.
>
> (Ingvartsen, transcribed performance monologue)

What is the name of the kind of object that is "exactly the opposite of a clear object that has a clear function and utility"? As discussed in the previous chapter, its only name is: *thing*. It is indeed the thing in its non-utilitarian singularity, or things in their ungraspable, unlocatable, afunctional multiplicity, that Ingvartsen repeatedly evokes in her choreographic work—most notably in *Evaporated Landscapes* (2009) and *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012), in addition to this section of *Speculations*. When Ingvartsen invokes things in the dark, she reveals the dark also as a non-object, a non-utilitarian thing—and therefore as a determinately vague space full of virtuality, of potentiality, a phase-space where collective processes of experiencing vague things can take place.

The problematics of thingness in and as darkness prompt the following choreopolitical premise: to experience dances in the dark is to participate in a "gestural disorder, a disruptive choreography that opens onto the meaning of things" (Moten 2008: 208). Jack Halberstam notes that "the movement of things can be felt and touched and *exists in language and in fantasy*, it is flight, it is motion, it is fugitivity itself" (Halberstam in Harney and Moten 2013: 11, emphasis added). Similarly, Ingvartsen's words, tone, pace, affect, posture, warmth, pauses, hesitations, do not confer to these indefinite things that populate her narrative ("a silence," "a landscape," "a book," "a cloud," "a little hill") an indeterminate aspect.[17] On the contrary, in the detailed precision of her descriptions, in her consistency in delivering the virtual, these indefinites appear, in the dark, as dark-things reflecting the social situations that the black mirror always makes us face. They are very *determined things*—insisting and persisting and enacting what things do best. These things reveal, in obscurity, a non-enlightened yet fully coherent political dimension of collective sociability as such: "the dimensions of social or political connectedness that the thinking [in the dark] suggests," as Ingvartsen has written about *Speculations*.

Philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman might agree with Ingvartsen in the sense that he describes the speculative-imaginative desire to intervene directly into how things appear in and to the world, and the desire to work directly on re-imaging "the status of the image—on the use value we give to it." This desire has one crucial consequence for contemporary social life: on it "depends in fact *the apparition of the political as such*" (Didi-Huberman 2009: 87, translation mine). One proposition for the apparition of the "political as such" in *Speculations* is the activation of what Ingvartsen calls language- or word-choreography, which becomes the suturing element enabling a connectedness with potentiality and the virtual under the singularity

or force-field of speculative dark substances or black images. These must take place, both for Didi-Huberman and for Ingvartsen, through a "minor light."

Let's recapitulate the discussion so far. If darkness offers what Deleuze describes as potentiality and freedom, then it follows that "the thing we see in the dark" must express the double articulation *potentiality-freedom*. And what expresses in the dark this double articulation, the thing that we see in the dark, is the concretion of darkness as black reflections of and on the singularity whose name is the free or fugitive *thing*. If that is indeed the case, by affirming darkness in all its immanent potentialities, by affirming darkness "as such," the recent choreographic activations of darkness I am discussing also affirm new conditions for the political to emerge "as such."

The emergence of the political as such has nothing to do with mere dissensual redistributions of the relations between sense and perception, as in Jacques Rancière propositions on the "aesthetics of politics."[18] The darkness in the very different works discussed in this chapter is not necessarily, and perhaps even *not at all*, about experimenting with perceptual substitutions. It is not about a kind of desire for experimenting with a momentary fake blindness. It is not just a play of replacing one sensory organ by another—as many of these works have been received by the popular press, as for instance in the title of a review of Manuel Pelmus' *Preview*: "Movements in the dark force us to see with our ears" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, April 9, 2011). It is certainly not about reassuring us that, no matter what may happen throughout a performance in the dark, in the end all that darkness was there just as *a means*, a subterfuge, or an intangible yet totally utilitarian *object* to be *used*, to be *manipulated*, so that in the end, we may *grasp* something by regaining both light and sight, as suggested in the title of a review of Tino Sehgal's *This Variation*: "A piece of performance art set in darkness made me see the light" (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2012).

Contrary to the notion that these works offer their audiences a playground for the redistribution of the senses within pre-defined and pre-organized combinations of perceptual possibilities (as if bodies were always looking for a perceptual equilibrium in an endless economy of compensations within fixed possible combinations among the senses), and contrary to the idea that darkness in recent performance and choreography is a kind of momentary hurdle or obstacle to be conquered as audiences reach a dramaturgically happy ending that "makes us *see the light*," I advance another proposition: if choreography offers us darkness, it is to offer us nothing other than darkness as such—experiences that only darkness can bring, the activation of repressed dark matters. As Sorensen notes, "we see in the dark under all senses of 'see.' [...] In pitch darkness, we at least see the darkness" (2008: 240). I add to his observation the following: in pitch darkness we *at last* see the darkness. We see that which is generally not deemed worthy of being seen. Because in the end what needs to be seen is not more light, but darkness in the dark, throughout, in itself means and ends and beginnings and bridgings. And, in the darkness, to see its pair: blackness. An

important political aspect of these dances in the dark is (also) to activate political-aesthetic-critical power of blackness.

It is 2012 and we are all gathered, maybe fifty of us, within a nine-by-nine meter square, standing on a black dance floor, and inside a square metal grid holding several low-intensity, white, fluorescent lights flicking on and off occasionally, bathing the scene in a low phantasmagorical hue. The fifty of us compose the audience attending a performance of Brazilian choreographer Marcelo Evelin's group piece *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* (Suddenly everywhere is black with people). In front of us, moving over the entire surface of the square, a huddle of naked bodies, men and women whose contours are vaguely perceptible in the penumbra. Not a group, not a mound, not a pack, *it* slithers and glides and moshes and huddles as each one of its bodies moves on top of the other, or as one dives underneath the other, or as all try to climb on top of the other, or as all squeeze through one another, and as all pass through us, and in these anexact yet rigorous, indefinite yet determined motions they all make *it* keep going, while *it* makes them all keep going, as *it* does and undoes itself as form, maintaining itself as persistent black moving thing. Moreover, we can see a thick layer of pungent dark paint, made out of a combination of cooking vegetable oil and diluted charcoal, covering every one of the naked, sweating, sweated upon, panting, groaning, quiet, concentrated, endlessly moving, endlessly contorting bodies. *It* is about the movements in the semidarkness of this barely visible black blot against the black floor, the black blob against the black walls, formless, fleshy, assembling a collective body, a black collectivity disorientating space, time, dance, body limits, body image.

Everywhere they go, the black floor becomes blacker, as the black paint, which is like black blood or black rain or black sweat, oozes from the dancers' bodies. Black on black in the penumbra. *It* approaches us, sometimes uncontrollably, since the collective body of that thing is also a collective head, and moves according to the shared, distributed wills whose source will not be assigned to a single agent (choreographer or dancer) but becomes a kinetic-assemblic-distributed singularity—a singularity "which does not mean simplicity and even less univocity. It is singular what is irreducible and, therefore, bearer of strangeness (*étrangeté*)" (Didi-Huberman 2013: 81). So *they* approach us (since, in this work, "it" and "they" are one and the same, the determinatedly vague multiplicity of the black singularity), and we must decide quickly: if we stay put the dark blot will overtake us, literally stain us with its black ooze and turn us black; if we move out of the way, the black blot will continue doing its thing. For instance, to reveal that between darkness and blackness there is a repressed contiguity, a repression that is the very project of political enlightenment: "In the clear, critical light of day, illusory administrators whisper of our need for institutions, and all institutions are political, and all politics is correctional, so it seems we need correctional institutions in the commons, setting it, correcting us. But we won't stand corrected" (Harney and Moten 2013: 20).

De repente fica tudo preto de gente expresses how the semantic, chromatic, historical-political, and colonialist-racist continuum between darkness and blackness indicates that the "disruption of light" enacted in recent choreography has the potential to activate something remarkable and much-needed at the level of contemporary subjectification. Its choreographic activation of darkness as a black substance taking over representation reveals how the semantic unconscious surrounding all things dark is tied to, and coterminous with, the political-racial unconscious surrounding all things black.

De repente fica tudo preto de gente leaves no space for doubt: *to be in the dark* also means *to be with the black*: to be infused by blackness, given that once in the dark, audience and performers risk a choreo-chromatic fusion, a confusion and even dilution of identities, genders, ages, and skin colors through an amalgamation of a common black substance both covering bodies and revealing bodies as covered by the substance that makes them one collective. As the piece unfolds in time, "the moment becomes a theory of the moment, of the feeling of a presence that is ungraspable in the way that it touches" (Harney and Moten 2013: 94).

Black thing. As bodies slide and slither in the penumbra of a black box, a black box that squarely holds us inside its framed hold, bordered by batons of white light, we are reminded of how in slave ships—or in Evelin's Brazilian Portuguese, "navio negreiro" (or "the black trader's ship" in literal translation)—"there are flights of fancy in the hold of the ship" (Harney and Moten 2013: 94). Imagination in the hold, for sure, as activation of freedom away from control and its little performances of possibilities. And yet so much more. Particularly an unavoidable experience of deep fusion and confusion of corporealities in the hold, thanks to births, deaths, sex, defecation, vomit, touch, love, blood, whispers, cries, poetry, song, nausea, fevers, semen, babel of languages, hands on throats, feet on arms, sexes on sexes, backs on heads, the living and the dead, rats, fleas and seasalted lips telling of gods or speculating on love or planning another life or sharing dreams or telling of another kind of light in another kind of night, another kind of darkness, and all these fleshes piling up in the hold, fleshing the hold, and the exertion and exhaustion and the erotics and the arousal and the violence and the uncanniness until suddenly we are in another hold, the representational hold of a theater that gives not too much to light but offers its audience the penumbral vision of a bundle of seven brown-skinned and white-skinned, pitch-blackened bodies (men, women, menwomen, womenmen) moving determinately between abstraction and vagueness with their smells of sweat, charcoal, vegetable oil, sexes, anuses, and with their eyes and teeth shining in black luminosity, under the low glow of a "minor light" (Didi-Huberman 2009: 44, translation mine).[19]

Though *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* circulated in European festivals and was co-produced by the prestigious Kunstenfestival des Arts in Belgium, it was perhaps the Brazilian audience who responded most acutely to the piece's very specific black "flights of fancy" Moten and Harney say

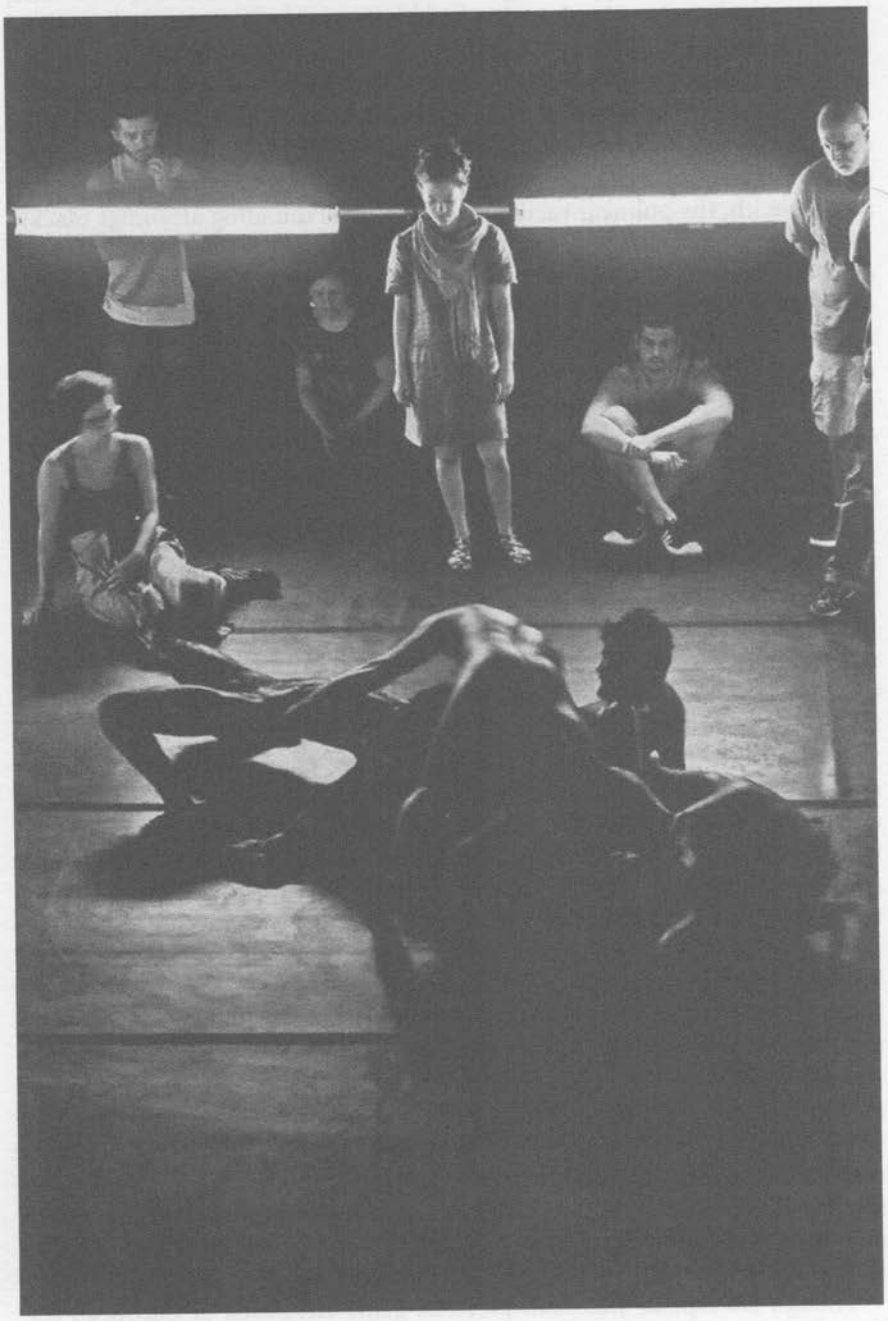

Figure 2.3 Marcelo Evelin. *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*. 2012. Photo: Sérgio Caddah. Courtesy of the artist.

still happen in the hold—especially when the tumbling blackness, the black anonymous collective, the unstoppable black thing bumps directly into an audience member, offering its ungraspable mode of touching, its specific mode of kinetic-tactile-olfactive-visual *black interpellation*. At that moment, it was hard for the Brazilian audience not to recall the verses of Castro Alves' epic poem "O Navio Negreiro" (The Slave Ship, 1869), which every high school kid in Brazil reads at least once, and which Caetano Veloso has set to a ferociously beautiful song not too long ago. Here is my translation of the poem's most famous section which is also included in Veloso's song, in which the opposition between the ship's deck and its hold emerges and where choreography is another, violent imperative for the "commodity that speaks"—and cries, and sings, and dances (Moten 2003; Harney and Moten 2013)—to keep dancing on the violent deck-stage of logistical, racist capitalism:

> We're on the high seas ... Mad in space
> The moonlight plays—golden butterfly;
>
> [...]
>
> It was a Dantesque dream ... the deck
> That the lights brightened and turned red,
> Bathing it in blood.
> Clang of irons ... snap of whips ...
> Legions of men black as the night,
> Horrible sight, dancing ...
>
> Black women, hanging to their breasts
> Scrawny children, black mouths
> Watered by their mothers' blood:
> While others, young women, but nude and frightened,
> Are by the whirlwind of specters dragged
> In vane anxiety and suffering!
>
> [...]
>
> Held by the rings of a single chain
> The famished multitude wavers,
> And weeps and dances, right there and then!
> One is delirious from rage, another goes mad,
> Another, hardened by martyrdoms,
> While singing, groans and laughs!
> Regardless, the captain orders the maneuver,
> And after gazing at the unfolding sky,
> So pure over the sea,
> Cries, out of the smoke of dense mists,
> "Snap that whip hard, sailors! Make them dance, more!..."
> (Alves 1869, translation mine)

De repente fica tudo preto de gente is another kind of black dance, a penumbral critique of how the choreography of logisticality, as the kinetic foundation of colonialism and capitalism, are all rings of the same chain, all sides of the same coin: the kinetic currency of a relentlessly exploitative, obscenely exhausting dance, moving modernity's propulsion towards ever closer links between capitalism, kineticism, and racism, forever, as long as its world of constrained possibles, of controlled freedoms and imposed gestures, remains hegemonic:

> Modernity is sutured in this hold. This movement of things, unformed objects, deformed subjects, nothing yet and already. This movement of nothing is not just the origin of modern logistics, but the annunciation of modernity itself, and not just the annunciation of modernity itself but the insurgent prophesy that all of modernity will have at its heart, in its own hold, this movement of things, this interdicted, outlawed social life of nothing.
>
> (Harney and Moten 2013: 93)

The choreopolitical, choreoracial insight that *to be in the dark is (also) to be with the black* deeply informs Evelin's *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*. The black substance that the dancers' bodies seem to ooze binds them together in a depersonalized, collective blackness, gives them force, expresses the surfacing of a whole biopolitical social skin and its shared (non)memory. It is the (non)memory of those who encountered the enlightenment of capitalist (un)reason through the violence of capture, of exploitative captivity, of choreographies of massive displacement. It is predicated on objectified-commodified bodies of utility that on the decks of all the slave vessels of logistical capitalism were and still are made to dance, or else. Given this history, Evelin's piece reveals that to be in the dark is not such an easy, or innocent, experience in a world whose hegemonic photochromatologics of power remain both fundamentally anti-black and anti-dark, thanks to the brutal enforcement of "an illuminated 24/7 world without shadows [as] the final capitalist mirage of post-history, of an exorcism of the otherness that is the motor of historical change" (Crary 2013: 9).

In contemporary capitalism's state of "permanent illumination" it is not darkness that creates affective-political blindness, nor is it in the dark that one experiences confinement or conformity. *Blindness, confinement, and conformity*, along with their compulsive choreographies of photonic gregariousness *are light-effects*—thanks to the incessant and insidious state of luminosity set up precisely so that what really matters can never be seen. Under this condition, we can begin to understand why choreography would eschew such a regime of light, why it had to embrace darkness, and through darkness, speculative imagination and blackness. We can begin to understand why choreography would have to address the conditions of the production of images and bodies and affects under captured light, and then experiment, politically, perceptually, poetically, corporeally, affectively, and critically, upon its own conditions of existence away from a light subservient to power.

Dances in the dark affirm alternative modalities for living and experiencing collective moments that make the world alien to itself, for acknowledging those zones of black life that persist within the racist and colonialist present, and to find ways to reenchant experience through darkness.

# # #

"The speed of darkness is the speed of light," Sorensen tells us (2008: 243). If the speed of darkness is the speed of light, what is the temporality of this black or minor light's singular velocity? Discussing Ingvartsen's *Speculations*, I advanced the hypothesis that it is the virtual temporality of all future-anteriors. Romanian choreographer Manuel Pelmus' 2007 *Preview* seems to corroborate this premise. When Pelmus titled his evening-length solo to indicate even before the performance begins, that this work is *a choreography that precedes view(ing)*, he was already proposing a deep ontological disturbance to the logic that supposes choreography's temporal identity to be synchronous with the time—and, therefore, the speed—of light. As Magdalena Wisniowska writes, "the world 'prior to birth' is the world prior to representation: the world before the givenness of sensation and before the subject-object distinction that constitutes all cognitive experience" (2014: 416). I like to think of the title of Pelmus' *Preview* as a reference to this world as it exists prior to the visibility enforced and privileged by the time properly assigned to choreographic representation.

As the audience enters the blackbox theater, we see only an empty stage with an empty chair right in the middle. Once we have taken our seats, lights begin to fade. But the fade just keeps going, until total darkness sets in. In an email, Pelmus told me how hard it is to get the different venues to accept this absolute darkness—especially when, unlike the other pieces discussed so far in this chapter, the darkness in this piece lasts for its entire duration. Permissions must be obtained, requiring meetings and negotiations with security staff, fire departments, technical personnel, and theater management. It takes a lot of work and determination to ask that a blackbox theater indeed agrees with its name and be in total and absolute darkness. Yet it is in this darkness that one is finally sitting as time passes, the sense of spatial orientation evaporates and *Preview* unfolds. After a few moments of silence, all of a sudden we hear the sound of a chair on the stage being briefly dragged. We understand, or infer, that someone, perhaps even Manuel Pelmus himself (without light, nothing can really guarantee us that it is indeed him), is on the stage, most likely sitting on that chair. A man starts to talk, unamplified, his voice seeming to emanate from the place where the chair sounds as if it is located: "Good evening and thank you very much for coming tonight," he begins:

> I began working on this piece by starting from some older but very persistent concerns of mine. Concerns that were mainly related to body and

> presence. So I began here: from body, presence, my body, my presence, in a given context. I was also trying to think and to relate to a space that is asked to modernize rapidly. To bodies that are demanded to become quickly modern, contemporary, and walk in pace with contemporaneity, rapidly without too much hesitation. I was thinking about the force that such demands have and about the impact they produce on bodies.
>
> (Transcription of performance text, personal communication with the author, June 2015)

And then Pelmus (he later assured me that he is the one dancing and speaking) shares with us the definition of movement according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. From this moment on, *Preview* will be structured in three sections. In the first, Pelmus describes with great precision his movements, positions, gestures, and bodily stances. As he does so, it becomes plausible for the audience to speculate that, given the many faint noises of steps and the alterations of breathing that are audible throughout Pelmus' narration, and given the displacement in space of the location of his voice, Pelmus might be dancing exactly what he is describing. In the second section, Pelmus again minutely describes a complex sequence of movements. But this time, since there are no added sounds, and the spatial location of his voice is fixed and his breathing remains steady, we deduce he may not be dancing what he is describing. Finally, once this second description is over, we start to hear again the sounds of a body moving in space, and we deduce that Pelmus is most likely executing the choreography he previously described. Once the sounds of these motions are over, the lights come up, and we again see the empty stage with its solitary chair in the same spot as it was in the beginning. We applaud, but the dancer does not return to bow. As in Edvardsen's *No Title*, the dancer is gone, from visibility.

In this sense, we could understand Pelmus' gesture of switching off the light as being one more moment in the conceptual critique of representational *dispositifs* engaged by experimental choreography over the past two decades. But, as in all the cases discussed in this chapter, the singularity of the gesture brings about consequences that go beyond the critical act—and actually seem to precipitate, at least momentarily, something other than critique. This is due to the simple phenomenological, physiological, and affective effects of darkness upon the subject: the dissipation of one's boundaries, the temporary suspension of location and self-location, the production of an effect that Roger Caillois described so well in his famous essay "On Mimicry and Legendary Psychastenia," first published in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* in 1935: "Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. [...] He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not similar to something, just *similar*" (Caillois 1984: 30). In other words: darkness opens up the experience of *becoming*

(and not just of facing or spectating) the impersonal abyss of unbounded collective potentiality.

In the dark, a collective amalgamates *precisely* because it lacks a face, and in lacking a face it disposes of that other essential component of accepted political agency: the individual, or rather, the person. Darkness is political precisely because it activates a collective impersonality that is filled with a boundless resonating power, one derived from the sensation of being part of a mass exchanging exteriority and interiority as a common substance that cannot be grasped.[20] Dances in the dark reveal an affective, imaginative, critical, speculative, and also sexual desire to experiment on and with a plane of existence that affirms itself against the photological machine that produces and regulates the boundaries of contemporary personhood.[21] What Fred Moten has called the capacity for blackness and darkness to access "the liberatory value of ensemblic depersonalization" (Moten 2008: 209).

It is through this liberatory capacity to access, at least momentarily, a collective stepping away from the "'dispositif' of the person" (Esposito 2011: 9) that has been so central to the history of dance[22] that darkness offers the potential for life to escape its preformed, predestined, choreo-policed pathways, and to run through alternative collective modalities of being (with) matter, including bodily matters and social and affective matters—as well as politically moving things, variations of flesh and subjectivity beyond the confines of the person and its juridical-affective norms.

Notes

1 There is no other word to qualify Deleuze's 1992 essay "The Exhausted," and perhaps no other way to have written it, except obscurely, opaquely, as Deleuze himself hints when invoking the need for an "obscure tension" when addressing images beyond the possible (Deleuze 1997: 170). For an extended discussion of Deleuze's notion of freedom of thought as freedom in the dark beyond possibilization in "The Exhausted," see the excellent essay by Magdalena Wisniowska, "Images I Cannot See" (2014).

2 The ellipses introduced by Deleuze in the quotation are telling. Beckett is even more radical in affirming the relation between darkness and freedom. For Beckett it is not so much the subject who finds personal freedom in the dark, but the darkness itself that is *absolute* freedom: "But the dark neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. *Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom*" (Beckett 2011: 107, emphasis added). For more on this radical escape from subjectivity into a darkness-freedom in Beckett's *Murphy* see (Mahaffey 2007: 190–191).

3 The question of the world's disenchantment already worried Max Weber, who saw it as a direct consequence of both capitalism and Christianity. With the German tradition, Schiller also saw in the arts the capacity to re-enchant the world by the means of imagination. For a discussion of debates over the tensions surrounding reason, enlightenment, capitalism, and the role of art in relation to enchantment, see (Elkins and Morgan 2009).

4 Enlightenment's "madness," its unraveling, or failure, does not peak in Nazism's scientific eugenics and rationalized industrial-genocidal operations—as Adorno and Horkheimer propose. French novelist and philosopher Pierre Klossowski argued in a short study on the pornographic writings of the Marquis de Sade, published in the same year as the revised edition of *Dialect of Enlightenment*, that Enlightenment's madness is constitutive to its project, always already present. As Alphonso Lingis explains, Klossowski saw in Sade a direct account of how Enlightenment's "rationalism, a hyperrationalism" *necessarily* and *constitutively* "comprehends and embraces the last limits of evil" (Lingis in Klossowski 1991: x). What Sade understood is that the obfuscation produced by the bright white light of Reason relegates into a darkness that rationalism itself produces not only those bodies that are deemed irrational or less than human, but *also Enlightenment's own inhumanity*: its rationalized and racialized violences and violations. Enlightenment's foundational violence is produced by this rational-juridical-aesthetic production of a particularly violent understanding of darkness and blackness, which are only conceived as Reason's abjected negative.

5 These little choices are precisely the way through which societies of control produce their proliferation of "freedoms" that have nothing to do with this dark freedom of potentiality. Following Michel Foucault's notion that the production of freedom by and in neoliberal control societies requires "in the same gesture [...] that limitations, controls, and coercions are set in place" (Foucault 2001: 386, translation mine), Félix Guattari observes that generalized control in contemporary capitalism "is nevertheless forced to preserve a minimum of degrees of freedom, creativity and inventiveness in the domain of the sciences, technologies and the arts, without which the system would collapse into a kind of entropic inertia" (Guattari 1991: 43, translation mine). "Imagination" and "speculation" in the dark are just the opposite of this controlled minimum degree of freedom cognitive capitalism calls creativity.

6 The Ganzfeld effect (from the German, meaning complete or total field) is described as "structureless visual field" by Erenson (Sorensen 2008: 243–234) and as "a phenomenon of perception caused by exposure to an unstructured, uniform stimulation field" akin to "perceptual deprivation" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganzfeld_effect; accessed February 20, 2016). Brian Massumi notes that this supposed deprivation is rather produced by total stimulation (Massumi 2002: 146–147). Thus, "a completely dark room can be considered a special case of a Ganzfeld" (Sorensen 2008: 199). This statement, of course, assumes that black is a color, and not an absence of color, as it is often assumed in aesthetic and color theory. Throughout this chapter, the working premise is indeed that "blackness is not the absence of color" (Moten 2008: 204). For a fuller discussion, see (Sorensen 2008, throughout) and (Maillet 2004).

7 For a discussion on the singularity of the Ganzfeld effect as being capable of producing "temporary states of depersonalization" in which you "not only extinguish seeing, you make people float out of their bodies and lose themselves, literally lose their selves," see (Massumi 2002: 145).

8 "A phase space *excludes any given determinate thing*, being a superposition of states that cannot phenomenally coexist. It is not phenomenal. It is an abstract space, or spacelike abstraction" (Massumi 2002: 147, emphasis mine). Although I agree with Massumi's description of phase-space as singularity, and as multiple superposition of singular or phase states, I strongly disagree with Massumi in one aspect: as we will see in a moment, with the help of Fred Moten in the particularity of the dark Ganzfeld, one very *determinate thing does exist*, insist, persist, operate: the thing called blackness.

9 This might also be considered in relation to Mallarmé's well-known photophiliac predilection for the dances of Loïe Fuller. The North American dancer performed wearing long veils of light fabric and was a pioneer of the use of electric lighting

in theatrical performances. Through a mix of theatrical light-effects and the effects generated by her undulating arm movements and rotations, Fuller created images in which the veils not only reflected the light falling on them, but seemed to irradiate *a light coming from within the dancer:* "the veil both draws from and attracts to that center a blinding light, 'l'éclair que la divinise'" (Shaw 1993: 63). Note, however, that Didi-Huberman, philosopher of images, thinker of the social-material conditions of image-making and of making apparitions, has a different view: "Loïe Fuller's aesthetic choices [...] distance themselves from the plain diurnal light, the one that makes us discern things 'clearly' in nature or in a theatrical scene" (Didi-Huberman 2013: 23, translation mine). However, Didi-Huberman goes on to say that even if Fuller shied away from the diurnal light, she nevertheless was driven by a desire to "become light"—and ended up by literally capturing that light corporeally, by applying on her body phosphorescent and even radioactive pigments, in an act of choreophotophagia that may very well be the only consistent destiny for modernist dance. Her dying words, were, famously: "The light, the light!" For more, see (Didi-Huberman 2013: 23–25).

10 For a discussion see (Shaw 1993: 75–77): "Though it does not actively constitute a part of the spectacle, the chandelier is, for Mallarmé, an important symbol in that it crystallizes the value of theater as illuminated, multifaceted form." See also page 57: "But like the crystal chandelier, which hangs above the audience exhibiting only its multifaceted glasswork, dance presents nothing but a transparent, multifaceted form: a dynamic exteriority illuminating only itself and the spectator's ephemeral, multifaceted vision."

11 The notion of thought as intuition has nothing to do with an anti-intellectual aesthetic immersion in spontaneous sensuousness. Rather, it derives from Henri Bergson's propositions for a philosophy of intuition. Didi-Huberman describes Bergson's "philosophical revolution" by explaining his notion of "intuition" as a profound critique of what we understand by "analysis." The former requires both a static object and a contemplative, and also fixed, subject—a most artificial, and indeed, inauthentic situation. While a philosophy of intuition embraces the reality (of processes) of becoming as always already taking place both within object and observer, and between them as well. Object and observer must be conceived as always, constitutively, in motion (Didi-Huberman 2013: 88–89). Remarkably, Bergson, in *Creative Evolution*, links his notion of philosophical intuition with the vagueness and evanescence produced by "*a lamp almost extinguished*" (Bergson 1922: 295). Intuition is philosophy looking for the darkness (where) things revel and reveal themselves as thing-events.

12 The link darkness-freedom in Beckett captured political and aesthetic imaginations decades before Deleuze wrote about it. Most notably, Theodor Adorno cites it a few times in his *Aesthetic Theory*, and notes that for Beckett, "The darkness of the absurd is the old darkness of the new. This darkness must be interpreted, *not replaced by the clarity of meaning*" (Adorno 2002: 27). Despite the promise of an interpretation that departs from "the clarity of meaning," Adorno does not quite deliver one. Throughout *Aesthetic Theory*, darkness remains linked to the expression of negative perceptions and affects, or to "dark humor" of the surrealists. Perhaps Adorno's hope in the (albeit revised, rescued) overall project of enlightenment and modernity prevented him, in the end, from taking darkness (and blackness in art) in its full positivity. In a section with the promising title "Darkness and Methexis," the possibility of a participatory aesthetics in and through the dark is never quite addressed, and once it is, in passing, it is again only done so as the negation of art: "Art's methexis in the tenebrous, its negativity, is implicit in its tense relation to permanent catastrophe. No existing, appearing artwork holds any positive control over the nonexisting" (135). In other words, the appearing of the artwork through participation of (its) darkness or

blackness as such is not to be taken as anything else than art's negativity as direct reflex also of post-World War II dark times of the cold war. For a critique of Adorno's positions in regards black and blackness see (Moten 2003 and 2008).

13 In a lecture in 2014, Ingvartsen defined this practice in the following terms: "*Procumentation* asks the following questions: How can documenting work be a proactive and productive activity that produces other forms of artistic expression, rather than a secondary practice that is done as a side activity to the actual work of art? [...] *Procumentation* considers that an idea can be materialized in many different forms and benefits from this multiplicity to come into existence. This means that long-term research can have many different outputs, creating a kaleidoscopic perspective on the idea, in its many representations. *Procumentation* shows the mechanisms of how thoughts and references get transformed, bastardized and absorbed in the artistic working process. *Procumentation* is the production and the fictionalization of the document. *Procumentation* does not explain its relation to the process of making art, it materializes it by blurring the borders between the art object, the process and the document. *Procumentation* addresses artistic performance work as a form of immaterial labor that must resist simple models of quantification and evaluation" (Ingvartsen 2014, unpublished communication).

14 My account amalgamates the two times I saw *Speculations* live, in Berlin 2012 at HZT, and Amsterdam 2015 at Rietveld Academy, and one videodocumentation of the piece at MDT, Stockholm in 2011.

15 For more on the distinctions between possible/realization and virtual/actualization, see Deleuze, *The Fold* (Deleuze 1993: 104–105).

16 On the relation between the "imagining of future anterior freedoms" and blackness, see (Weheliye 2014: chapter 8).

17 "'A' stomach, 'an' eye, 'a' mouth: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 164). This indefinite determination, persistence, consistency is exactly that of the singularity of the thing.

18 See in particular (Rancière 2006, 2010, and 2013). For a critique of this notion in relation to choreography see (Lepecki 2011).

19 "Just as there is a minor literature [...], there would be also a *minor light*, possessing the same philosophical characteristics: 'a strong coefficient of deterritorialization'; 'everything in it is political'; 'everything takes a collective value'; in a way that everything in it talks about the people and 'of the revolutionary conditions' immanent to its very marginality" (Didi-Huberman 2009: 44, translation mine).

20 At the perceptual level, the experience of becoming space in the dark described by Caillois is akin to the Ganzfeld effect: "a structureless visual field. Pilots experience a Ganzfeld when flying in a homogeneously blue sky. [...] Given that we see in the dark [...] there is a simpler way to create a Ganzfeld: put the subjects in complete darkness" (Sorensen 2008: 244).

21 For a critique of the figure and concept of the "person" as political and subject-oriented apparatus see (Esposito 2011).

22 "No matter how inextricably personhood is linked to a living body, the two are not wholly coextensive" (Esposito 2011: 8). But choreography has historically and foundationally made dance alloy personhood and the body into an unbreakable epideitic unit, whose only purpose is the self-praise of the dancer's personhood. As Mark Franko writes on the birth of choreography in Renaissance dance manuals: "Dance consists in actions [...] which demonstrate something [...] about the dancer who performs them [...] for himself" (Franko 1986: 15). See also (Lepecki 2006, especially chapter 1).

3 Limitrophies of the human

Monstrous nature, thingly life, and the wild animal

Monstrous Nature. Or we could just say: Nature. Both would mean the same. For isn't this what nature truly is: anti-natural, truly monstrous? As Deleuze and Guattari remind us, "illicit unions" and "abominable loves" are "the only way Nature operates—against itself" (1987: 246, 242). Or rather, against a certain image of itself. Which, at least in the history of Western dance, has sided the human with the unnatural. Thoinot Arbeau (1519–1595), Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810), Carlo Blasis (1797–1878), Isadora Duncan (1877–1927), Rudolph von Laban (1879–1958), Martha Graham (1894–1991), and the dance critic John Martin (1893–1985)—from all of them we see the same line of argument unfolding, about the human as anti-natural entity, as the paradigmatic emblem of a being that has lost its nature.[1] The human has been imaged by Western dance's bestiary as that animal that is not quite an animal, forever striving to find its lost (natural) grace—through endless efforts of discipline.

In this sense, dance's understanding of the human only reflects a wider cultural-historical foundation. If, as Jacques Derrida reminds us in his four essays on animality, a whole anthropo-philosophical and onto-theological tradition in the West asserts that "the human order is distinguished from nature," this distinctiveness derives from "an imperfection, because of an originary lack or defect (*défaut*) in man, who has," paradoxically, "received speech and technics only inasmuch as he lacks something" (Derrida and Mallet 2008: 122). That "something" the human animal lacks is, precisely, *nature as its nature*.[2] In this "lack or defect," in this loss, the art of dance in Western modernity has functioned as a pedagogical-medical remedy, a clinical as well as an aesthetic discipline whose goal is to help humanity regain its lost nature. In this quest, dance is plagued by the realization that its very practice reveals the ultimate impossibility of any remedial closure. Dance remains all too human. Every one of its steps, even when approaching the animal, ends up retracing the boundary that severs it, and its dancers, from nature. Every danced movement is a painful reminder of defectual imperfection as humanity's own denatured nature. In this sense, dance becomes an exercise in what Derrida, writing on the non-human animal, called "limitrophy": a series of experiments on "the bordercrossing from which vantage

man dares to announce himself to himself" (Derrida 2008: 12). Dance, as a *discipline*, has fully participated in this drive to announce Man to himself. While the act of dancing permanently reminds humans of the impossibility of any clear announcing.

At least, this is what Heinrich von Kleist seems to suggest in 1810, in his curious parable on the nature of dance, "On the Marionette Theater."[3] In this short text Herr C., a principal dancer at the local theater of an unnamed town, engages the narrator in a kind of Socratic dialogue to persuade him that puppets are superior to humans in their capacity to dance gracefully. As the two friends converse, it becomes clear that grace (including graceful movement) is perceived as being fully present in anything that is non-human: beasts, inert matter, machines. "We see that in the organic world, as reflection grows darker and weaker, grace emerges more brilliantly and commandingly," says Herr C. towards the end of the text (Kleist 1982 [1810]: 243–244). Earlier in the dialogue, the narrator has already concurred: "I told him that I was well aware of how consciousness could disturb the natural grace of man" (242).[4]

The capacity to reflect and the possession of (self-)consciousness are two constitutive disturbances in what would otherwise be "the natural grace of man" (242). Thus, the inevitable conclusion: "Grace appears purest in that human form [*menschlichen Körperbau*] which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in the puppet [*Gliedermann*] or in the god" (244, translation modified). Kleist demarcates a very specific surface for graceful movement and graceful dance. Its vertices: the puppet, God, and finally, as the text will make abundantly clear, the animal. These three figures define what could be called, after Deleuze and Guattari, a common *plane of immanence*: "a unity to the plane of nature which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural [...]. It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocality. We therefore call it *the plane of Nature*" (1987: 254, 266). At the center of this triangulated plane (but also removed from it, indeed severed, cut out, expelled) we find the human, fallen from grace after having eaten from the tree of knowledge. This impoverished being, "this passive finitude, this infirmity, this lack from which the animal does not suffer" (Derrida and Mallet 2008: 130), this entity who is not quite a beast and not quite a god, and still not quite a machine,[5] this *exception* or *rent* in the fabric of nature, can only strive for a kind of imperfect, never quite or only momentarily graceful, always too *affected*, too self-conscious, dance.

It is not only consciousness and knowledge that impede human participation in the plenum of nature. According to Herr C., an excess of affectations, moving about as if by their own volition to body parts where they do not belong, in a kind of ontological hysteria, also disturbs the alignment between humans and the plane of nature. As he explains, the displacement of nodules of affect from the "natural center of gravity" to peripheral locations throughout the human body impedes the alignment of human dancers

with the immanent movement of inorganic or non-conscious matter: "look at young F., who dances Paris [...] his soul is located (and it is a fright to perceive) in his elbow" (241). In the face of such frightfully affective moving body parts, the advantage the "puppet would have over living dancers" is "first of all a negative one, [...] and that it would *never* behave *affectedly*" (240, emphasis added).[6] As with the puppet, so with the animal. Towards the end of the essay, Herr C. describes a brief episode from his past involving a bear to further emphasize the graceful correspondence between the movement of inorganic matter and that of organic yet non-human matters. During a stay "on the estate of a Livonian nobleman," Herr C. is invited to enter a fencing match against one of his host's sons. Herr C. easily wins every combat, since his opponent's "*passion* caused him to be confused" (243). Frustrated, the nobleman's son gives up, but states, "there was a master for everyone" and that Herr C. should meet his. Concurring with his defeated son, Mr. von G. then asks for this superior fencer to be brought in. It is a bear.

> "Go ahead, attack," said Mr. von G. "See if you can hit him!" When I had recovered somewhat from my surprise, I lunged [at the bear] with my rapier. The bear moved slightly and warded off my thrust. I tried to mislead him by feinting my thrusts, but the bear did not move. I attacked him again with all the skill at my command. I most certainly would have left a mark on a human breast, but the bear moved only lightly and warded off my thrust. [...] The bear's *seriousness* robbed me of my composure.
>
> (Kleist 1982: 243, emphasis added)

In its fight with the human, the animal surpasses its opponent on all levels—not only in grace, economy of effort, precision of movement, and lack of affectation, as with a puppet, but also through an additional, and quite surprising, element: its "seriousness" ("*Der Ernst des Bären*," writes Kleist, a word connoting also gravitas, solemnity, and, rather interestingly, *pensiveness*).[7] This highest level of intent and gestural consistency, attuned to all the singularities unfolding in the situation, reflects the bear's total alignment with the velocities of the world, and makes it a superior fencer, able to anticipate with absolute precision his human opponent's attacks or feints. No wonder: in the plane of consistency, all velocities co-respond.[8] In corresponding, a superior kind of thought emerges: animal serious pensiveness.

This mention of the bear's "seriousness" also indicates something about the temporal singularity of its behavior. It is as if the animal neither reacts nor responds, but *pre-acts*. Its movements are always in consistency with all of the micro-events simultaneously unfolding in its environment, resulting in a state of hyper-awareness that expresses what Erin Manning calls intense "pre-acceleration of movement" or "elasticity of the almost"

(Manning 2009: 115).[9] The bear's anticipatory movements indicate how, in the non-human animal, the velocities of matter, sensation, meat, and spirit fuse so that time and movement co-respond in such ways that the bear's perception of all those defective-affectionate human intentions takes place even *before* human action occurs. The bear's precise pre-actions are less anticipations of human intentions than revelations of the fact that the expression of human gestures not only always lag behind the time of their intentional creation, they lack behind the time of God's creation: nature. Focused and fully co-synchronous with the plane of matter and with the univocal yet heterogeneous plane of consistency called Nature, Kleist's intent and serious bear is a true representative of what Derrida calls "divinanimality" (2008: 132).

It is important to keep in mind how Kleist's short text has informed and expressed deeply ingrained ideals about dance that have emerged throughout the history of modern choreography. Indeed, it is notable that some of the ideas in the conclusion of Kleist's essay resurface nearly word for word, over one hundred years later, in Isadora Duncan's writing. Kleist's final remarks state that "we would have to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence [...] and that's the last chapter in the history of the world" (Kleist 1982: 244). Virtually the same idea appears in Duncan's writings, which imagines humans and animals partaking in the same kind of dancing, having arrived at the end of historical time and thus having gained infinite knowledge:

> Man, arrived at the end of civilization, will have to return to nakedness, not to the unconscious nakedness of the savage, but to the conscious and acknowledged nakedness of the mature Man, whose body will be the harmonious expression of his spiritual being. And the movements of this Man will be natural and beautiful like those of the free animals.
>
> (Duncan in Cohen and Matheson 1992: 124)

Until then, meanwhile, human gestures and dances will always be defective. They will always be defectors from the plane of immanence of nature. Which means *that humanity requires an altogether different understanding of its own immanence*. It is a defective immanence. And if that is the case, to accept a human dance means to strive for another kind of relation to movement: not through an endless and constantly deflected search for what human movement can never be (the movement of animals, of God, of the puppet, or the immanent movement in the fabric of nature), but by dancing what humanity is: defective lack, affectionate being, anxious flesh, hysterical animal.

Derrida writes that the problem the animal poses to humans is that of a whole "limitrophy" (Derrida 2008: 29), a continuous questioning of the never fixed boundaries between those who name themselves "humans" and those that "humans" name as "animals." Kleist's parable treads on such

limitrophy, and troubles the border between human and animal through the figure of a bear possessing two qualities usually attributed to the "human" alone: seriousness and intent. It does so not by approximating one to the other, but by indicating how the human is in itself the muddling of these limits (beast-limits, puppet-limits, god-limits) and modes of being (being animal, being machine, being divine). Kleist indicates how this singular muddling called the human, this perpetual capacity for motley, unnatural transformations, is the human's own mode of being in relation to the event of nature.

If this is the case, the choreographic challenge should not be to overcome the defect of too much affectation, or of affects ending up in improper body parts, but rather "it would be a matter of developing another 'logic' of decision, of the response and of the event" (Derrida 2008: 126). The kinetic expression of this other response to the event, dance, would necessitate a logic that would not place the human as striving for a supposedly lost animal nature, for a puppet-like embodiment to come, or for truly unattainable godliness. This other logic for dance would necessarily embrace the clunky movements of broken things, the faulty and incoherent motion of the life of things inhabiting the graceless expressions of affectionate humans. It is a dance informed by all those defective and defecting deviations that compel men and women (and non-men and non-women in all kinds of engendering and sexing) to make their dances in order to reveal "the indeterminate polyvalent organ [...] the temporary and transitory organs [...] the hysterical reality of the body" (Deleuze 2004: 48). It is a dance informed by "the monstrosity of the flesh, as a site for freedom beyond the world of Man" (Weheliye 2014: 125), an insight so powerful as to be the epigraph of this chapter.

Barred from nature and paradise alike, humans might as well strive for a dance made of exertions and their broken recoveries, as opposed to looking for transcendent principles of movement. This is why one must say, always: *monstrous nature*. Because by saying it, we also say, synonymously: *human nature*. The two expressions essentially co-respond. It is this particular correspondence that troubles, thanks to the monstrous, any clear limits between humans and beasts. The monstrous is what approximates humans to the plane of Nature.

Monstrous nature. We could also be saying: *human history*. No wonder Kleist's text is also a parable for history and historicity. It positions historicity as the defining trait, or Biblical mark, or divine curse, of the human. Here, history names the deviation that rends the human from the plane of nature and, consequently, from the plane of graceful (i.e., affectless) movement and dance. This is very clear in Kleist's text: the impossibility of a graceful or natural human dance derives from the fact that humans are essentially beings that have *fallen into historical time*. As we have seen, Kleist understands nature, the machinic, and God as equivalent to one another: unaffected matter living outside historical processes. And if it is true that the planes of existence defined by each of those terms exist and consist, univocally, in what we could call time, it is also important to note that theirs is

a particularly *ahistorical time*. The univocal plane of nature–god–matter expresses a single, intracoherent temporality for all its multiple singularities. If *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature, to use Spinoza's expression of equivalence), it follows that the only time there is, is that of an already consummated history, a history that is already (re)solved from the start by its choreo-theologically planned (re)solution. Historical processes are produced by the achoreographic *clinamen* performed by a fallen consciousness, by the swerve that consciousness necessarily is. They result from the shock that imperfect or defective human knowledge imposes against the plane of nature, plucking the human off from that zone where God, animals, and inorganic materiality co-consist: a zone of *divinanimalithing*. Thus once more: *monstrous Nature*. Or we might also now say: cracked or torn plane of matter whose other name is history.

# # #

In 2011, an extraordinary evening-length performance created by Brazilian choreographer Marcela Levi and Argentinian theater director Lucía Russo premiered at the SESC Copacabana Theatre in Rio de Janeiro. Titled *Natureza Monstruosa: a Matéria Estalada* (Monstrous Nature: Cracked Matter), the fifty-minute-long piece—the first collaboration between the two Latin-American artists—is performed by three dancers, Laura Samy, João Lima, and Clarissa Rêgo, who are also credited as co-creators. When I sat at the mezzanine theater at SESC Copacabana for the world premiere of *Natureza Monstruosa* on November 2011, my first sense of the piece took hold even before the performance had began. The stage's floor was completely covered by a rust-colored, shaggy carpet, suggesting the fur of some gigantic beast. The deeply tactile sensations that emerged from looking at this furry surface were mixed with vague olfactory ones, as the industrial carpet fibers covering the stage floor heated under the glare of theatrical lights and gave off a faint, subtle scent that induced a slight discomfort.

We sat, time passed. The thick fur also seemed to absorb sound, nothing really echoed in the space. The theater is rather small and we were all very close to the stage. Then, the first dancer steps onto the stage from an opening in the wings upstage left—her arms are held almost parallel to the floor, slightly bent at the elbows, hands clinched as if holding a horse's reins or maybe a bicycle's handles, torso slightly arched back, hopping soundlessly by lifting her knees up high, creating an effect of riding a prancing horse, traveling alongside the upstage wall, head turned to face the audience as she goes. After a few steps matter-of-factly entering the stage she suddenly makes a U-turn, retracing her steps and exiting through the same opening through which she had entered, still holding the same pose. For the first long minutes of the piece, all three dancers consecutively enter and exit from that same upstage left spot, though none of them cross beyond the middle of the stage: each quickly returns back to the wings by making a U-turn. One after the other, prancing along, rarely interacting with each other, each going at

different speeds and levels of urgency. The repetition of this simple choreographic image suggests, or induces, an odd vision: adults acting like children pretending to be riding horses; or, alternatively, dancers hopping pompously like a kind of nineteenth-century buffoon pretending to ride a bike. It is striking how Levi and Russo conjure totally recognizable images, yet leave them dangling there, absolutely familiar and yet resisting exact historical referentiality. The main element that impedes referentiality: the monstrous, humanly produced sounds coming from the gap upstage where the dancers enter and exit, like a gaping mouth from which emerges the most wrenching, impossible, loudest yells, cries, and screams, an infernal bellowing. Cries that only the human beast can produce make up most of *Monstrous Nature*'s soundtrack. And yet the odd consistency of the strutting and parading, the odd sense that these prancing movements come from somewhere else, from a specific place in time, the sense that they refer to a very precise history, finally bursts into a kind of revelation, a crystal-clear dialectical image coming from the history of dance: these are stylized cakewalks! Infernal cakewalks, to be more precise, revealing and expressing and exuding the mix of horror histories and pleasure stories that inform this historically African-American dance form. In the after-show talk that evening, Russo and Levi shared with the audience that for the making of the piece they had watched and studied Georges Méliès' short dance film *Le Cake-Walk Infernal* (1903). Strutting, parading in a buffoonish manner, yet with serious intent, dancers come and go on a stage where it becomes clear that a whole history of violence and dance takes place on the backs of entire groups of human beings relegated to the category of the animal, and that "the human is therefore wrought with physiological and narrative matters that systemically excise the world's most marginalized" (McKittrick 2015: 9). And if some humans can cakewalk like that on an animal's back—surrounded by the most horrific cries bellowed by someone else, someone we'll never see, stuck in the black pit, outside the scene—it is only to reveal their condition as parasites of non-human animals as well as of their fellow humans.

Hellish place indeed: from the gap into which the dancers vanish and from which they emerge in clockwork rhythm, the devilish yells, hardcore metal screams, enraged glossolalia spurt out to fill the stage with throaty, raspy, violent, beastly cries that only humans can make. And then, once in a while, there are long periods of silence that are sometimes cut by the sound of a man slapping his hands against his chest to produce a sound similar to a horse's gallop, or by one of the women chirping quietly or whistling like a bird. And since our heads are tilted to one side throughout almost the entire piece, because most of the action revolves around the partition upstage left (with two exceptions: a one-minute-long still image stage-right halfway into the work, of the male dancer and one of the female dancers making a sitting centaur-like figure with the furry carpet, and in the very last scene, as the three dancers crawl all over the stage floor, pushing their faces against the fur), it's as if the choreography, staging, lighting, and sound all create invisible reins that pull our skulls to that one side of the stage, just as one

Figure 3.1 Marcela Levi and Lucía Russo. *Natureza Monstruosa: a Matéria Estalada*. 2011. Photo: Paula Kossatz. Courtesy of the artist.

pulls a horse's neck to shift the direction of its movement and perception. Choreography or taming. One and the same thing. Henri Lefebvre called the science concerned with how societies choreograph agency and subjection "rhythmanalysis." The most important term in this science binds movement to politics via the paradox of an animal-related expression: "*dressage*" (taming). As Lefebvre writes: "Humans break themselves in [*se dressent*] like animals. They learn to hold themselves. Dressage can go a long way: as far as breathing, movement, sex. It bases itself on repetition. One breaks-in another human living being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement" (2004: 39). Quite depressing this link between the normative self-taming of humans and choreographic acts of repetition where, in the end, "something *passes as natural* precisely when it conforms

perfectly and without apparent effort to accepted models" (38–39). This something passing as natural also includes monstrosities, horrors, tortures, aggressions, necropolitical modes of being, thanks to the choreopoliced repetition of a *naturalized* division between beings said to belong to the category of the human and beings said to belong to the category of the animal.

With humans appearing and disappearing from only one (and always the same) side of the stage (as if seen through monocular vision of the horse) like so many flickering visions of abrupt eruptions of violence, with humans producing undecipherable bird-like sounds, with humans dancing strange little quasi dances, inconsequently strutting around, and with humans horribly screaming, yelling, crying, bellowing from behind the wings out of the audience's sight, as if trapped in some dark hole framing representation—or from the hellish pit outside of representation—*Monstrous Nature* proposes another mode for dance, one which embraces what Kleist viewed as irreconcilable: the broken human, the wild animal, and the devilish divinity. Their amalgamation, their unnatural nuptials—illicit, abominable, but essential—is the dancing of a humanity which is also the enactment of a poetic language for the end of time.

The end of time, the end of history, is also the moment, as we have seen, when Kleist proposes that the reunification of the planes of inorganic matter, non-human animals, and humans with the divine will finally take place. The end of history is actually a return to a non-shattered or splattered matter, one that reflects the grace of a dance whose essence becomes uninterrupted, ideal, divine movement. Choreography here becomes eschatology: a perfect angelological movement, without bumps, without faltering, and mostly without the faltering precipitated by affectations, emotions, vanities, feints, and botched or betrayed desires.[10] Harmonious times, necessarily, indeed, ontologically post-human, the end of historical time is evoked in *Monstrous Nature* through a series of poems that have been handwritten on large sheets of white paper that are draped over the arm of one of the dancers. Standing on a furry platform, her body as still as a statue, dancer Clarissa Rêgo is pushed in and out the stage from the same spot upstage left from which all dancers enter and exit. The effect is almost cartoonish, as if the dancer's body is some kind of cutout figure. We see two hands firmly grasp Rêgo's legs right above her ankles and push her onto the stage. She holds her pose absolutely still. After a minute or so, the same hands pull her back into the wings. This happens three times in a row, and each new entry brings a new sentence on the large sheet draped on her arm. The first and the last lines of the poem explicitly invoke some apocalyptic event: "Twenty years ago, a meteorite fell on this place [...] after that people started to disappear" reads the first placard. "And then came a great earthquake. The sun went dark, the moon turned red, stars fell to earth and all the hills and islands were removed from their places," reads the third one. In between the two, on the second placard, as if diagnosing the predominant affect of a world devoid of people, a world composed of nothing other than cracked

matter, of massive clashes of things against things, a world convulsed by catastrophic tectonic movements, we read the only statement possible on this humanless world: "How tranquil. The most peaceful place in the world."

Between the beginning and the end of history, restless humans choreograph the world with their lack of peace. They make the world infernal with their endless scurrying back and forth, their strutting about, as if all of their self-centered, human activities mattered to matter. After some forty minutes of horrifying cries and soft, uncanny whistles, *Monstrous Nature: Cracked Matter* ends with the recorded sound of a man's voice filling the space as the three dancers join in a spastic crawl across the entire stage. They crawl from their upstage left entryway all the way to the other side of the stage while rubbing their faces and bellies hard against the artificial fur, like worms trying to burrow into a rusty ground, or parasites clinching their host's skin, looking for a blood line. In matter-of-fact-tone and speaking at a fast pace, a recorded man's voice tells us a story:

> Once upon a time there was a place with a small hell and a small paradise, and people walked from one place to the other and found them, hell and paradise, and took them as their own, and they were truly theirs. People were small but they'd make a lot of noise. They'd say: "This is my hell. This is my paradise." And we must not dislike mythologies like this, because they belong to people, and in matters of people, loving them is what matters. And then we love their mythologies. Apart from that, the place was execrable. People squeaked like mice and grabbed things and let go and grabbed each other and let go. They'd say: good afternoon, good evening.

As soon as the word "evening" is pronounced, the lights cut out abruptly, to total blackout, and the piece ends. It ends with an evocation of the parasitic trait scurrying through the human animal, pushing the human into a state of endless movement between personal little hells and personal little paradises, between possession and abandonment, anguished exhaustion and exhaustive exploitation. But the piece also ends by stating what really matters "in matters of people." *Monstrous Nature: Cracked Matter* closes by offering the only ethical position in a world populated by humans living in execrable conditions, a world moreover where dancing must nevertheless occur: to love and praise those stories human love makes.

# # #

Monstrous nature. Or we could also say: social life's underbelly. In 2010, in London, during the last weeks of the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You*, at the Hayward Gallery, the French choreographer Xavier Le Roy presented a group work titled *Low Pieces*. Quite differently than in Levi's and Russo's work, *Low Pieces* was also a meditation on the condition of the human in relation with the limitrophies of animals, machines, and inorganic matter.[11] Lasting about one hour, *Low Pieces* starts with exactly fifteen minutes of

dialogue between the audience and the piece's nine dancers, who are lined up along the stage, sitting close to its edge. Without any microphone or electronic amplification, Le Roy is the first to speak, welcoming the audience and explaining the rules of the situation: for exactly a quarter of an hour, everyone, audience and dancers, will engage in a conversation. Xavier gives no theme, no direction to this conversation. He just expresses a desire that is also a score: to talk, together, across the proscenium divide for a limited, predetermined, amount of time. The fifteen minutes will be measured by the lighting technician, who has been instructed to cut the lights to total blackout once time is up.

This proposition having been given, what immediately ensues is an example of human behavior when faced with a break of protocol, habit, and reified natural modes of being together. First some nervous giggles, then embarrassed laughter, and finally, a barely camouflaged antagonism emerges, with the audience firing off a series of questions to the dancers, more or less aggressive, more or less ironic ("So, how is this conversation supposed to start?" or "Where do you come from?"—the tone of voice inflecting the questions towards a not so dialogical mode). Soon, Le Roy has to remind everyone that he has proposed a conversation, not an interrogation. Empowered by this simply delivered statement of fact, some audience members start talking back to other audience members. As time passes, the whole thing starts to feel less like the negotiation of disagreement Jacques Rancière has seen as the foundation of the political, than a demonstration of the very impossibility of the social. "Everyone speaks, no one hears," as Michel Serres once described the world of human interaction, a world in which what passes for communication is, most of the time, nothing other than parasitic, self-centered noise (Serres and Schehr 2007: 121). When the exchange finally oscillates between going out of control and cohering into actual conversation, the lights go out.

In total darkness now, the possibility of face-to-face interaction that has been central to various understandings of the political (as in the work of Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Chantal Mouffe, or Jacques Rancière) and the ethical (as in the work of Emmanuel Levinas) vanishes. And a kind of spontaneity emerges, of the micro-fascist sort that only a certain genre of animal can perform: that of contemporary gregarious citizens expressing themselves "freely."[12] Catcalls, guffaws, piercing whistles, annoyed grunts of impatience, nervous laughter. It's as if the lack of light gives the audience permission to express, non-linguistically, what language has previously camouflaged: impatience for a dance that uses an openness to time, physical rest, and the restlessness of language as kinetic and affective modalities of a performance that also embraces nonperformance. After a couple of long minutes in the dark, the lights come up suddenly, bathing the entire stage in a bright white glare. We see five naked bodies arranged closely together upstage, three of them lying on the floor, two of them lounging, resting on their arms, all a bit off-center, none of them facing the audience, and each going through their own repetitive, self-absorbed, machine-like movements.

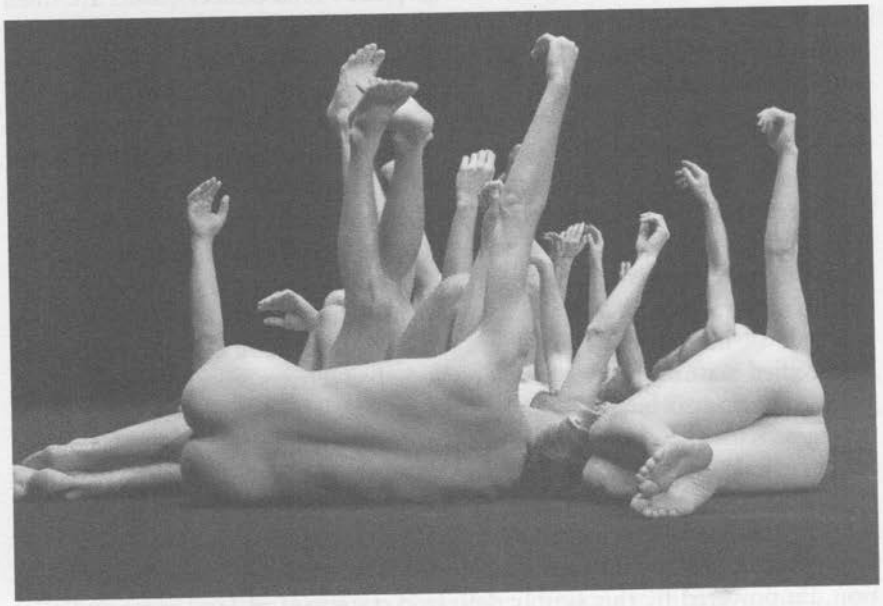

Figure 3.2 Xavier Le Roy. *Low Pieces*. 2011. Photo: Vincent Cavaroc. Courtesy of the artist.

These are clearly not puppets, but they certainly seem to operate as mechanical beings, repeating in neat precision their coordinated yet empty gestures. After about ten minutes of repetitive, machine-like motions and noises voiced quietly by the dancers, who never interact with each other, never leave their spot, never face the audience, another two-minute blackout ensues.

When the lights return, the group of mechanically moving humans has been replaced by two new clusters of naked bodies, one with three, the other with four dancers, all lying on the floor, arms and legs stretched in the air, swaying in different rhythms. The overall effect suggests an aquatic environment, as if each arm or leg was a branch, an inverted pendulum, of some large underwater plant. This simple scene lasts about five minutes, and then is cut off by yet another two- or three-minute-long blackout.

Once the lights come up again, abruptly, the stage is filled with eight individual naked bodies scattered in crouched or crunched positions. No one faces the audience. All remain absolutely immobile. This image acquires referentiality thanks to the relationship it has with the previous staged tableaus: after the first tableau with mechanical movements, and the second one with aquatic motions, the isolation and scattered immobility of these crouched naked bodies strongly suggest a mineral stillness. Five minutes pass in this rocky-fleshy quietness, followed by another blackout. After three minutes, the lights return for the first time on a totally empty stage. This

repetition with a significant difference of the staging protocols indicates that this time, another element will become present on the stage, another proposition is about to arrive. Not mechanical, not floral, not mineral. Indeed, the appearing of the empty stage in the sequence operates as a "differenciator," as Gilles Deleuze, in the rarest grammatical maneuver in his philosophy, calls the agent of difference that precipitates the emergence of singularities (Deleuze 1994: 207–221). And, as such, in the next scene the dancers are not pre-set onstage, in mostly immobile poses, but enter the scene gradually, slowly, one by one, on all fours, mimicking as accurately as they can the measured pacing of some large feline. Its seriousness and indifference are impressive.

Lasting for ten minutes, this is by far the longest of these tableaus, as all nine dancers, pacing about measuredly, enter into and out of several group configurations: some join in little clusters, others lie down together in twos or threes, while others sometimes individuate, and roam about the stage only to lie down on some corner and stay there. A pride of lions, one cannot help but think. And, just as one starts to admire the virtuosity with which the dancers embody the feline qualities of motion, a blackout ends the scene.

After a couple of minutes in pitch-black darkness, we hear again, still in the dark, unamplified, and quite close to us, Le Roy's voice. As in the beginning of *Low Pieces*, he proposes that we all "continue the conversation" for another fifteen minutes. After the first reaction of generalized laughter from the audience, it is clear that by now the atmosphere in the theater has considerably changed. It's as if the dense unfolding of movement, and the quiet intent and seriousness of each of the previous scenes, have tempered the space with a different disposition toward actual dialogue. The consistency of the tableaus, as simple and sometimes funny as they have been, has precipitated another affect into the environment. I would call it consistency, but maybe the way Kleist describes his bear are the better terms: seriousness, pensiveness, even if in their lightest modes.

There is more actual listening now in the exchange between audience and dancers: the pauses reflect attentiveness, and an actual conversation, as opposed to ironic interrogation, starts to take place. The pitch-black darkness also helps to facilitate the unfolding of the dialogue. In this public arena where thoughts and voices are no longer visually bound to faces and their identities, it's as if the audience no longer feels the need to scurry around, grabbing and letting go of ideas and words as if these were precious (self)-possessions in one instant and deadly weapons the next. This is not an immediate consequence of the blackout. Note how in the first time the audience experienced it, there was no listening, just self-expression. This means that darkness has now been modulated as well, thanks to the operations of dancers pensively enfleshing the inorganic and the non-human animal. It's as if, having journeyed through an exposition of the quiet worlds of the mechanical, the floral, the mineral, and the non-human animal, only to be plunged

into total darkness, a bunch of individuals haphazardly thrown together across lines of chairs known as "dance audience members" could slowly move towards a provisional collective of singularities, where some kind of voicing-as-listening, some kind of listening-as-voicing, is able to reinvent expression as something that moves away from self-centered positions and self-posing attitudes. I am reminded of John Rachjman's statement, concluding his reflections on the concept of immanence in Deleuze: "we need a new concept of society in which what we have in common is our singularity and not our individuality" (Rajchman in Deleuze and Boyman 2001: 14). Something of the kind happened at a micro-level in that set of individuals, who after going through the limitrophic experimentation offered by *Low Pieces*, lost a bit of individuality, a bit of personhood, and acquired an openness towards the event and its call, which is the call for a sociability suspending the bad habits of the human: judgment, resentfulness, identification, representation, disavowal of the strange, of the stranger.

Low Pieces offers a remarkable squaring of Kleist's limitrophic triangulation of the human, in a kind of profane version of his diagnostic of the defective condition immanent to the human animal. Only this time, with Le Roy, instead of machine, animal, and god, we have the machine, the plant, the mineral, and the non-human animal on one plane, the stage, *and*, across the line (or on both sides of the line actually) those noisy creatures of belligerent nature, scurrying between their own private hells and their own private paradises, the human parasite. Or rather, a particular form of human parasitism: the contemporary urban bourgeois subject, living and moving under the choreopoliced conditions (blending discipline and control to the minutest levels) of neoliberal subjectivity. But this is the point: along the thin line that separates stage and audience, dancers and spectators, choreographer of art works and choreographers of daily gestures, what is demonstrated is the possibility of existing as a being-for-metamorphosis, living human life outside of "liberal monohumanism" (McKittrick 2015: 11). The line that separates is also the line that sutures.

In its symmetrical dramaturgical structure, with an opening invitation in the light for a fifteen-minute-long conversation, and a concluding invitation in the dark for another fifteen-minute-long conversation, *Low Pieces* performs a kind of Kleistian return to the beginning. It returns to emphasize difference, the differen*c*iating difference resulting from the effect of witnessing the fellow members of our species inhabiting, seriously, four alternatives to the human. Performing another kind of affect for the exhausting politics of personal face-to-face, this performance is mediated by the strongest aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming," namely that all becoming is not only a becoming-minoritarian but a particular "involution" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 273) towards the animal. This involution is essentially "creative" and asks for an animal relation to the animal in the human. It embraces the idea that "in truth, there are only inhumanities, humans are made exclusively of inhumanities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 190), "*an*

inhumanity immediately experienced in the body as such, unnatural nuptials 'outside the programmed body'" (273) and thus asks the human to step outside of its preformatted expectations about how it should relate to beasts, and offers instead the beast, the stone, the plant, the abstract machine lodged at the heart of the human as more joyful modalities for living. As Roberto Esposito explains it, this "becoming-animal" is "a way of being human that is no longer defined in terms of alterity from our animal origins" (Esposito 2011: 114). This monstrosity experienced in the body that is wild enough to dare the event of becoming, is the most crucial singularity to embrace and set free, indeed it is the very condition of possibility for other modes of sociability.

This is why the heaps of dancers, the careful floral-like arrangements of flesh, the machinic assemblages, the feline serious yet indifferent intent, are so important in *Low Pieces*. They remind us that contemporary subjectivity finds untenable excuses to flee the animal's greatest promise: a suspension of a certain kind of unbearable humanity, understood as "a series of hierarchical power structures that apportion and delimit which members of the *Homo sapiens* species can lay claim to full human status" (Weheliye 2014: 19) by giving that status signifiers such as White, Man, Citizen, Subject, Individual, or Person. The category of the human affords to those who assemble under these names the freedom to plunder and violate under the rule of the "free individual," the molecular basis for all micro-fascisms.

It is remarkable that in a discussion of dance, and with the triangular delimitation of god–animal–machine, Kleist identified in the early nineteenth century the molecular fascism inherent in the human. In an all-too-human episode from Kleist's parable, a young man, "approximately sixteen years of age [...] whose figure was filled with a wonderful grace" (Kleist 1982: 242, translation modified), suddenly glimpses his reflection in a mirror while at the public baths and sees himself striking a beautiful, graceful pose resembling a well-known statue. Commentaries on this section of Kleist's text emphasize that when the young man tries to repeat the gracious pose, he fails miserably, over and over again, and that he ends up falling into despair in later life: "after a year had passed, nothing remained of the grace" he once had (Kleist 1982: 242). Yet no one (to my knowledge) has commented upon the fact that the boy's repetition of his gesture does not result from his vanity, but *exclusively* from a false judgment, a resentful remark, a micro-fascist blockage, pronounced by an adult (the narrator) from whom the boy was seeking recognition regarding his graceful posture. The boy's failure to recapture his youthful grace results from a resentful and untruthful judgmental remark that sets him off, and plunges him into the graceless cruelty of humanity. Note that the narrator, through his speech act, performs a kind of primordial, envious cut:

> Now, just as my young friend was lifting his foot on to a stool to dry it, he was reminded of the statue while he looked into a tall mirror; he smiled

> and told me what he had discovered. *I had, in fact, noticed the same thing at the same moment*. But—*I don't know* if it was to test the security of his grace or to provide a salutary counter to his vanity—*I laughed* and said that he must be seeing things!
>
> (Kleist 1982: 242, emphasis added)

In a rare moment, there is concordance between two human beings in witnessing the improbable eruption of grace and the even more improbable double recognition of its emergence: just as the young man has seen grace in the mirror, the narrator "had, in fact, *noticed the same thing at the same moment*." But it is the historical habit of humankind to perpetuate the resentful law that cuts off the human every time one of its members skims the plane of consistency, every time the human joins with the plane of nature/plane of immanence. Thus, the narrator responds not by reaffirming what both have just seen, simultaneously, but by casting a false judgment in order to botch even the most innocent of becomings. That's why it is only in the dark, with no distorting mirrors brought by the field of enlightened debates and self-asserting personalities, without the resentful act called humanity, and in the case of *Low Pieces*, only *after* the animal, *after* the floral, *after* the mineral, and *after* the machinic,[13] that we can find for the human beast a momentary promise of untamed, yet seriously intent, social invention.

# # #

Monstrous nature. Or we could also say: unnatural nuptials between tamed beasts and wild humans as choreopolitical singularities. German choreographer and performer Antonia Baehr's works—indeterminate experiments that fall somewhere between music recital, choreography, performance art, lecture performance, and theater of images—offer detailed cartographies of the struggle between the forces of social normativity and the wild forces of invention. In her pieces, a main compositional element is always foregrounded: the explicit operations of underlying scores that preformat and guide even the most apparently natural act or gesture, as brilliantly demonstrated in *Laughter* (2008), in which Baehr laughs and laughs in endless variations by following minutely composed scores.

In recent works like *Merci* (2007), *My Dog is My Piano* (2011), and *Bestiary Abecedary* (2013–15) another element has emerged in Baehr's work: the non-human animal. The turn toward animals in Baehr's work also oscillates between wildness and nature tamed, or nature scored. It reminds us that the reiterative impetus of any performative interpellation as proposed by Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997), not only ensures the simultaneous co-materialization of (classes of) bodies and (classes of) subjects but also applies to the ongoing process of de-re-materialization of that entity we call the animal. By extending the performativity of the human subject to the realm of the animal, Baehr theatrically, choreographically, and musically re-articulates Derrida's

"transgressal" proposition. For Derrida, it is by naming entire zones of existence as belonging to the "animal" that an onto-anthropo-phalogocentric-carnivorous mode of discourse reaffirms and redraws the arbitrary and vague line between human (power) and animal (subjection). One reiterates the animal as animal precisely because the line that divides animals from humans is tenuous and constantly under threat of dissolving.

In a way that tenuous line is already delimiting the German choreographer. As she writes in the opening line of her book *Abecedarium Bestiarium: portraits of affinities in animal metaphors*, which accompanies the homonymous series of performances she has created collaboratively between 2012 and 2014: "My name is Antonia Baehr, which means bear in German, and I was born in Berlin, which is pronounced bear-lin. The symbol of Berlin is a bear. Many people say I look like a bear. And my paternal relatives are also like bears ..." (Baehr 2013: 7). Given the patronymic force of the Bear/Baehr as a naming event that inflects the artist's subjectivity towards a dance-historically relevant animal, as already discussed, it is not a surprise that Baehr's pieces have been recently investigating the animal/human (non) divide via the mediation of language, of physiognomic affinities, and of precise movement and sound scores. These investigations all partake of the notion of inter-species love, passionately monstrous nuptials.

In Baehr's hour-long solo *My Dog is My Piano* (2011), she uses live DJ-ing, video and other kinds of projections, storytelling, and singing to compose a narrative about the lives of her mother, "the painter and engraver Bettina von Arnim," and her dogs, and especially focusing on Tocki, the dog von Arnim was living with at the time the piece was made.

In the performance's first scene, Baehr appears behind two turntables and directly addresses her audience. On each turntable is an LP with different sound recordings. To her right, an LP containing sounds made by her mother going about her daily life, to her left, an LP containing sounds made by Tocki, also in its daily activities. Baehr announces that the piece is composed of three distinct parts. In the first part, Baehr uses the two turntables to play, mix, and remix sound recordings of her mother sewing in her studio in the afternoon, eating lunch, drinking water, and talking, and also sounds of her mother's dog grooming, eating, drinking water, and barking. Working through the recording's grooves, Baehr finds not only coincidences, but starts to increasingly emphasize the resemblance between woman and dog in their sonic and vocal expressions, in their rhythmic patterns, and in their non-linguistic vocalizations. After a while, Baehr's sonic comparisons—first playing one section of one LP, then one section of another LP, with no other effects added—start to blur any clear demarcation between the animal and the human and between the human and the animal. The grooved lines in each LP start to intermingle, entangle, and bundle in tight sonic symmetries.

Tellingly, this first part of the performance is titled "*Qui se ressemble, s'assemble*." Or, as she immediately tells us, with a beaming smile: "*Qui ne se ressemble pas, s'assemble*." As Baehr clarified to her English-speaking audience, in a performance in 2011: "This is a French saying that means: 'Who

resembles tends to assemble.'" What she failed to translate in the performance I saw was the second, or alternate, title: "Those who do not resemble, assemble." It is in this indecision between dissemblance and resemblance as driving forces for inter-species life-assemblages that the whole piece revolves. Regardless of similarities or differences, what becomes clear is that inter-species assemblages and assemblies remain possible as long as the affective field is conducive to a life outside of the regimes that materialize, through performativity's particular mode of violence, body making and subjection, a "human" and their "animal," or a "woman" and her "dog."

This first part of the piece is divided into "two sides," as Baehr tells us, each corresponding to the two sides of the LPs containing Bettina's and Tocki's recorded sounds. "Side A," announces Baehr to her audience, "is the parallel life, living side by side," and which I have just described above. Picking up the LPs and turning them to side B, she continues, "Now, Side B is the shared life, relating to each other." Baehr then mixes and juxtaposes the two sound sources, of dog and woman living side by side, of Tocki and Bettina sharing their lives sharing life. Particularly important on Side B is the moment when Baehr states: "inter-species linguistics, companion-species *patois*: this is how Tocki and Bettina have assembled." Baehr proceeds to explain:

> *Patois* is a French word that refers to any language that is considered non-standard. And it's a derogatory term, a bad word for local languages, a bad word for non-standard language. Etymologically, it comes from Old French, meaning "incomprehensible, rude language." *Patoier*, which in English would be something like "Pawese": talking with one's paws. So, it's a queer, impure, non-standard, cross-bred, mongrel, *bricolé*, self-made, bastard language. It's quite dysfunctional, it doesn't work in a proper way, really. But it works pretty well in an *improper* way, as we will see.

Again: *monstrous nature*. Or we could also say, with Baehr: to make the improper work well, as improperly as possible. Or still: to assemble ethical-political-linguistic queer alliances between mongrels engaged in inter-species experiments on *transgressal limitrophies* (to invoke one more time Jacques Derrida's own *patois* in his essays on the animal that therefore we are [2008: 29]). Or even: to assemble the dis-resembling ones who speak with paws in their mouths so that crossbred language can work "quite well," even in improper ways. In all of these possibilities, Baehr's piece shows how language's monstrosity, its unnatural nuptials, is the expression of an alliance and a "shared life" between those who are supposed to be kept apart across the human/animal divide. This is the political aspect of *limitrophy* that Derrida posits as the main question the animal continuously, intently, seriously, poses to us: "a properly *transgressal* if not transgressive experience of *limitrophy*." Limitrophy's concern is with "what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what

feeds the limit, generates it, raises it, and complicates it" (2008: 29). As Derrida expands on the definition of this concept having to do with the performativity of the materialization of the animal, limitrophy is

> what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. In the semantics of *trepho*, *trophe*, or *trophos*, we should be able to find everything we need to speak about [the] animal: feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically. (29)

In *My Dog is My Piano*, we see a version of autobiographical limitrophy being played out and troubled. In the manipulation of the LPs of the animal recording, and of the human record, in the bridging of the two sides of lives that dis-ressemble and therefore must assemble, Baehr performs the collapse of clear limitrophies by experimenting with the inter-species articulation of a talking with paws in the mouth.

My Dog is My Piano methodically searches for visual, choreographic, and architectural traces of this loving assemblage, of this mongrel or monstrous nuptial between a woman and her dog, a dog and her woman, the "interval dog-mother" as one can see in one of the projections during the performance (see Figure 3.3). But can we say it is really a woman, a mother? On one hand, yes, it is essential, politically, to affirm woman in the inter-species pairing. On the other hand, Baehr herself troubles the status of her mother's participation of the human species, even as a female representative of the human species, since the first entry of her book *Abecedarium Bestiarium* is dedicated to an imaginary animal named Arnim, whose scientific name is Farfelus Malacus (which I would translate as something like "Soft Extravagance"). Baehr introduces the animal Arnim thusly:

> My surname is pronounced "bear" like the name of the animal in both English and German languages. My mother's name is Bettina von Arnim. As I child I said to myself that if my paternal surname was an animal's name, then my mother's surname had to be that of an animal, too. However, this animal could only be a poorly known and entirely unresearched kind, since it couldn't be seen alive anywhere and nobody at school ever talked about it.
>
> (Baehr 2013: 20)

What follows are seventeen pages of extremely precise descriptions and drawings, made by a ten-year-old Antonia Baehr, of Arnim the animal habitat, food habits, illnesses, sexual behavior, and peculiar anatomy. The species after which her mother is named, or the species named after her mother's name, that softly extravagant beast, has one powerful, and utterly

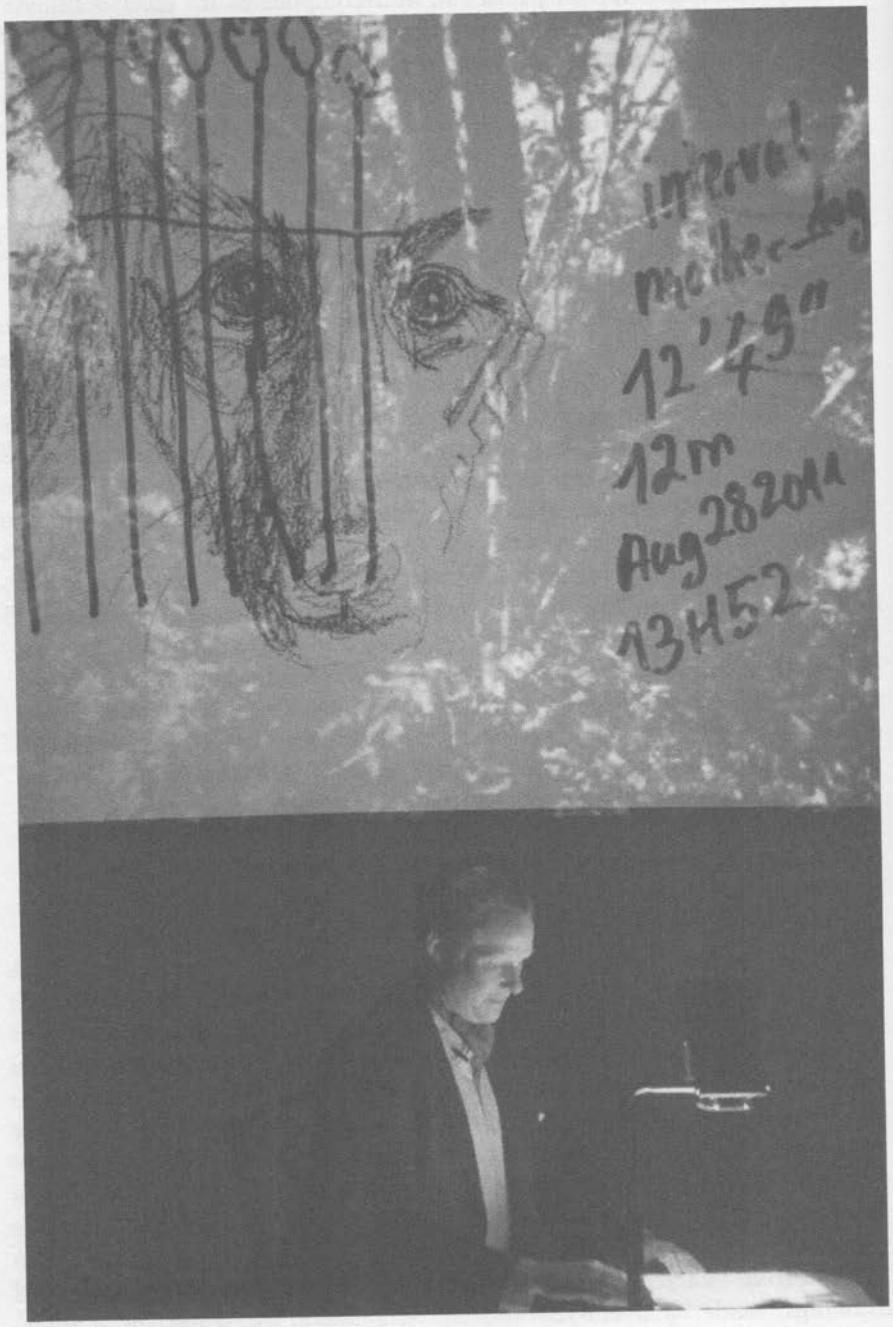

Figure 3.3 Antonia Baehr. *My Dog is My Piano*. 2011. Photo: Gaetano Cammerota. Courtesy of the artist and XING.

amazing, trait: "Its reproduction in its natural habitat is unique in the world [...]. They procreate with other animals (mice, lizards, crocodiles, cats, ...)" (29). The Arnim is the actual embodiment of unnatural nuptials as the only rule of desire: "improperly" making love with the most foreign species, sexing with the world, out of love for the world's endless sexes.

Thus, in the second part of the *My Dog is My Piano*, titled "Haus Musik" ("Home Made Music" in English), Baehr exposes what she calls "domestic affairs" between pets and her mother as a "Choreography/composition of cohabitation," the expression she writes on a transparent plastic sheet, places on an overhead projector, and beams onto a screen at the back of the stage, next to the DJ table. In this section, video projections show images of details inside and outside the house where Bettina and Tocki live. These images offer an affective biography of the pair, but what is particularly crucial in this investigation of affective limitrophy is how traces of animal presence and traces of human presence co-align to transform the architectural environment, causing confusion about whose house this is after all. Does it belong to all the dogs and non-human animals that have lived and continue to live in it over the last two hundred years, or to the humans? We see images of doors marked by years and years of dog paw scratches, and pictures of stone slabs "polished by the fur of the guard dogs that lived there and by the soles of the humans who also lived there," as Bettina von Arnim explains in a voice-over. In a particularly telling moment, Bettina explains that since the different dogs who inhabited the house each had different kinds of fur, the birds' nests around the house became more or less well-built, more or less cozy, more or less lasting, depending on the dog. The house is made by the dogs, the dogs dwell in the house, the dogs shed hair that gets made into nests, the birds reproduce at different rates according to the dog hair available. A nest is an architectural becoming of dog's hair; a bird is an avian becoming of a dog's hair. At the end of the performance, Baehr moves to a music stand and vocalizes a ten-minute "song" whose broken melodic line is made up of vocal sounds that continuously transition between recognizable words, indiscernible or mongrel, *patois*, and recognizable barking or growling. *My Dog is My Piano* is an affective cartography for a renewed assemblage with the animal in the human and the human in the animal.

# # #

Monstrous nature. Or we could also now say: wild loves, since life is always living "unnatural" love affairs, always making love to its many worlds, always assembling improbable elements into untamed arrangements, always making love and desiring and having sex to and with and through them. It is because the world and its beasts call for untamed movements of desire that "we always make love with worlds" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 294), that the plane of consistency of desire functions like Arnim, the fantastical creature that has sex with all the creatures in the world. Naturally. Abominably lovingly. But in order to make love with worlds,

we have to venture into the world, encounter its inhabitants, dwell with its forces. Since the mid 1970s, this has been the project of New York based dancers and choreographers Eiko & Koma (Eiko Otake and Koma Otake). To go where wild things are, so to reassemble humans with animals, culture with nature, and dance with the wild *thinganimal*, perhaps because in animals and in things Eiko & Koma "recognized [...] the end of something and potentially the path to an alternative to this world," as Jack Halberstam writes in a different context (Halberstam in Harney and Moten 2013: 7). Choreography here is again an experimental limitrophy.

Take the final sequence of Eiko & Koma's silent video work *Wallow* (1984), their first and only outdoor performance made exclusively for the camera. The entire image is segmented into two large horizontal bands. On the top half, a platinum-colored view of the Pacific Ocean is rhythmically traversed by downward-moving horizontal lines—crests of waves, moving down the screen, and stopping at the tide's maximum reach on the sand. On the lower half of the image, a stretch of wet sand appears as a compact, solid, unmovable plane. Vertically traversing this image, disrupting it, re-cutting it, cracking it open, we see two black lumps inching upwards, plowing the sand and our field of vision while leaving behind two parallel lines, curving just slightly: the tracks made by the crawling bodies of Eiko & Koma, as they slowly, yet decisively, intently, in their "infinitesimally calibrated motion" (Greskovic in Bremser 1999: 97) inch towards the vast ocean. Two incongruous black masses of flesh, wearing ragged pieces of animal hide, arms under their torsos, legs inert, push forth, bound by an unbreakable alliance, in a difficult crawl. Stubbornly, painstakingly, they aim themselves towards the waves that will surely swallow them soon—and, with them, the band of sand, and the whole frame, in a tsunami of pixelated silver ocean. Ominous image? Hopeful image? A verdict is not possible. This is an image that refrains from proffering a judgment.

Yet its highly geometric composition does not remain abstract. The proximity of those two crawling bodies—who have purposefully relinquished verticality, bipedalism, manual ability (in short, the traits that mark humans as agents of action, as masters of their own actions), and who now confront the forces of the earth, the forces of the cosmos, and the forces of the flesh (ocean, sand, wind, tidal waves, muscle fiber, rock, gravitational pull) as they share and invoke, inch by inch, side by side, a common yet absolutely uncertain destiny—their mute alliance, creates another image, one that is not in our retina, but rather within our affective field. Eiko voices the singularity of such affective field in a poem printed in the program of *Fur Seal* (1977), the performance at the Japan Society in New York where Eiko & Koma first performed as a duo a piece that, seven years later, would generate *Wallow*:

> How mediocre, how banal you are
> Your somber elastic shape
> Your dolorous lumps of rubber

Bob and sink in the sea
In the sorrowful rays of the evening twilight.[14]

Wallow is a silent video. Neither its images nor its editing convey a hint of narrative. Yet sonority (whether music or poetry) blasts through its images in a silent resonance filled with rumors of the ocean, water crashing against rock and sand, wind whistling through crevices, sand crushing beneath their panting bodies. The absence of sound in an image that remains so blatantly sonic reveals one of the principles of Eiko & Koma's approach to creating their art. Each compositional element is linked to all of the others, and all are constitutively linked to the underlying movement of what Jane Bennett calls "vibrant matter" (2010). Every image that Eiko & Koma create (on the stage, on video, on windy beaches or cold rivers) conjures this fundamental or foundational sound-movement, which need not be heard, or even seen, but simply sensed: the infraultrasonic movement of untamed things.

Koma explicitly discusses the creation of resoundingly silent images in an interview about their installation *Breath* (1998). Elements in this large environment completely mix the human-made with the non-human-created: dry leaves, cloth and fabrics, theatrical lights, moving air, and soil (the latter composed not just of clay, rock particles, and sand but filled with microflora and microfauna also interacting inter-specifically with Eiko's and Koma's nearly naked bodies). *Breath* also included a silent video. According to Koma, the purpose of the soundless projection was that "the *video image* could work as sound." Completing Koma's line of thought, Eiko similarly links visuality to sonority: "We used these waving hills and breathing bodies as a *visual soundscape*. It's something that *your ear doesn't pick up but your eye does*" (in Yokobosky 2000: 34). The creation of a visual soundscape requires Eiko & Koma to produce non-sonorous sonic sensations to be "picked up" by the eye, not the ear. By picking up sound visually, eyes become not only a kind of ear, but also a kind of *hand*. Eiko & Koma's pieces work as much on their bodies' sensorial organization as they do on their audience's. Their singular repartition of the sensible already involves an unnatural or monstrous sensoria thanks to the work of their quietly wild choreography. A *patois* of the body: only this time it is not paws that are in the mouth, but ears that are in the eyes so the eyes can pick a sound just as a hand picks up a rotting leaf.

The first condition for Eiko & Koma to anti-naturally scramble the habitual organization of their audience's sensorial apparatus is that they work directly on the things of the world in order to establish fundamentally non-hierarchical relations between animals, objects, things, images, sounds, bodies. All are made to resonate with one another, thanks to that imperceptible element that binds them together—micro-movement, the vibration of matter, zones of intensities. Their transgressal limitrophy does not just pertain to the reiterative line that materializes humans as humans and animals as animals: it extends itself across the plenum of nature, to embrace every thing there is, singularly re-materializing every one of its elements, even those considered *mere things*.

By working directly on mere things, they work directly on mere perception, turning it metabolically into the full sensation of intense micro-events.

Monstrous nature. Or we could also say: the errant "movement of things" that "will not cohere" (Harney and Moten 2013: 94). So that perception may be released from cultural taming, from properly domesticated organs, each normatively attuned to a short band of dedicated stimulus, so that perception, once freed, may become sensation and "act directly upon the nervous system" (Deleuze 2004: 36). Movement must oscillate incoherently in a narrow band within which micro-intensities, singularities, are ahumanly redistributed so that they might flower into wild events. Thus a very slow, occasionally spasmodic, almost still, and always intensive movement must be enacted in order to produce a non-domesticized sense of dwelling. This is what curator Matthew Yokobosky refers to as Eiko & Koma's "movement as installation" (Yokobosky 2000).

Fusing a spatial dimension with a kinetic one confirms Eiko & Koma's fundamental concern with leveling all compositional elements into a non-hierarchical, non-vertical, and "*transgressal*" distribution of perceptions. Like bands of silent waves crashing onto the shore over two lumps of flesh, the works of Eiko & Koma pursue this overflowing horizon of sensation. In their investigation on sensorial limitrophy, what matters above all is "being able to present ourselves as nameless creatures," as Eiko has explained (Yokobosky 2000: 26). To be nameless is (as Derrida reminds us in his writings on the animal) to be removed from the sphere of influence and mastery of the human, including the mastery of human beings over human beings:

> Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. [...] They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: "The Animal," they say. And they have given it to themselves, this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the *naming noun* [nom], the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: The Animal.
>
> (Derrida 2008: 32, emphasis added)

To be nameless, to withdraw oneself from the corralling function of naming that imprisons and domesticates both humans and animals into their absurd mode of co-existence, is to open up life's horizon. No wonder that the horizontal is so prevalent in Eiko & Koma's art. As with their prone bodies in *Wallow*, many of Eiko & Koma's works involve their bodies lying down—on theater stages (*Land*, 1991; *Mourning*, 2007) or gallery floors (*Breath*, 1998; *Naked*, 2010), on a sandy beach (*Wallow*), in the grass (*Offering*, 2004), or in a graveyard (*Tree Song* at St. Mark's

Church, New York City, 2004). Theirs is a particular genre of nameless human mobility that longingly seeks to exist alongside the discarded, the forgotten, and the irrelevant: those matters that ground all grounding. This is why, when lying down in dances of quasi-stillness, or performing one of their non-spectacular crawls, their spasmic or quivering or smooth gestures reveal a surprising affirmative power, urgency, and force. Eiko & Koma's embrace of what only a hyper-agitated society would perceive as passivity is actually the very opposite of a lingering inertia, the opposite of a theatrics of failure, the reverse of any kind of wish to represent a theological fall. On the ground, they find for dance its humanly inhuman plane of immanence: their embrace of the horizontal activates a necessary regime of quietness where bodies become a conduit for the forces of the earth, turning bodies and forces into a kind of *collective thing*. It is in this sense that Eiko & Koma's work offers a direct answer to Kleist's parable of the fallen human as cursed to ungraceful dance. If the human in Kleist is onto-theologically expelled from the plane of immanence, the plane of nature, Eiko & Koma take this fall as humanity's only nature and push it further. Instead of striving for flight, ascension, like the marionette that barely skims the floor on which it dances, Eiko & Koma make the fall last forever, they plunge down as deep as they can, by burrowing themselves into their bodies, making their bodies succumb under their own weight, each becoming its own ground and grave and soil and soot. They then push themselves into the earth, plunge into rivers, dig into sand, or are swallowed by massive waves. Eiko & Koma make of the horizontal planes of the earth a new zone of immanence for a not-quite-human dance, suturing body and environment in conjoined disjunction of dance and animality, sculpture and thingliness. Thus, they leave the world and join the planet.

The event of this "disjunctive synthesis" (Gil 2013: 126, translation mine) might be called a "becoming space" of the body—a compositional strategy where the dialectics of inside and outside, image and background, movement and rest, human and thing, organic and inorganic, as well as received notions of the body's presence in dance are pulverized, ground down, put to rest. What I am calling "becoming space"—so instrumental to the composition of Eiko & Koma's pieces such as (1984), *Husk* (1987), *Hunger* (2008), *Mourning*, and *Raven* (2010)—is a notion advanced by Roger Caillois in his 1935 essay on animal mimicry. Animal mimicry is the biological phenomenon that describes instances where animals resemble animals of other species, or plants, or the surrounding inorganic environment, and where stillness and slowness are so important. For Caillois, such mimicry reveals how bodies and environment share "reciprocal topographies" (1984: 23). This reciprocity is already a kind of natural experiment in transgressal limitrophy, or monstrous nature.

Monstrous nature. Or we can also now say: my body is always a reciprocal spatialization of your body, of their bodies, of the planet's body. Caillois saw in mimicry a mix of sculpture and photography: "morphological

mimicry ... could be an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image, a reproduction in space with solids and voids" (1984: 23). This is what he called, in a perfect neologism, "teleplasty": a fusion, a wild coupling, between environment and corporeality that transforms bodies into a new class of being situated somewhere between organism, sculpture, image, and thing (1984: 23). This is the crux of Eiko & Koma's work: a becoming-space of the body, and a becoming-body of space, a becoming-thing of the organic, a becoming-organic of things. For Caillois, there was some amount of danger in this project. In this "real temptation by space" the body could dissolve into mist, a specter, thanks to a "depersonalization by assimilation to space" (Caillois 1984: 29). But isn't this drive towards the depersonalized inorganic precisely what allows Eiko & Koma to create their dances as if they were a sculpture, as if each work was sometimes a space-desiring beast, or at other times simply a mere thing? Isn't this drive towards the inorganic—so essential also to Butoh, with which Eiko & Koma were involved early in their careers, having trained with Tatsumi Hijikata in the early 1970s, and later with Kazuo Ohno—the force that gives their art a politics and an ethics?

This is the "transgressal," abominable, loving proposition made by Eiko & Koma's art: by synasthetically leveling the perceptual field into singularities of sensation, by producing images that resound into installations that are movements, by siding with animals and plants and things to the point of teleplastic (con)fusion, by producing dancesculptures, videodances, kinetic-poems, visual soundscapes as so many reciprocal topographies and unnatural assemblages in which artistic fields, space and body, life and death, human and animal, man and woman, the organic and the inorganic, the virtual and the actual all change and share and mix positions, Eiko & Koma lead "the mind and the body to the extreme regions of the non-living, where, perhaps, they were always already directed" (Perniola 2004: 16). Theirs is not at all a morbid project. It is rather the celebration of what Eiko has called a "sense of experimentation and adventure" in which whatever is being made, "sometimes it is not necessarily only about the human" (in Yokobosky 2000: 27). Sometimes it is about non-human animals, plants, insects in the soil—but many times it is about inorganic things, salty waves, cold fronts, vibrations, rocks, wild calls. It is about becoming space or becoming inorganic. As Eiko explains: "it is a *relief* for us not to be confined with humanity" (in Yokobosky 2000: 27, emphasis added).

What does it mean to make art in order to be relieved once in a while from humanity? It means to enter into what Italian philosopher Mario Perniola calls the logic of "things that feel" (Perniola 2004: 1). As discussed in chapter one, the specific call for dance to "move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself" was famously made in 1966 by Yvonne Rainer in her manifesto on minimalism in dance, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," first published in 1968. But

Figure 3.4 Eiko & Koma. *Wallow*. 1984. Photo: Kazu Yanagi. Courtesy of the artist.

in Eiko & Koma's work, we can perhaps see this call take a more radical turn. Rather than to be moved *by* a thing (surrendering only part of authorial sovereignty to objects or material devices), their project is to move *as* thing—thus totally suspending the human as emblem of absolute, authorial sovereignty.

What are the specific procedures Eiko & Koma use in order to enter into the logic of "the thing that feels," in order to make it the mode for creating their work? First they have to forge an unbreakable alliance between the world of humans and the world of things—a partnership so deep that it deserves the name of symbiotic assemblage. Again, searching for inorganic and non-human modes of being is not the same as embracing diminished, impoverished, humiliated, or abject forms of living and of being in the world. As Eiko remarks, wishing not to be human "is not to say I deny humanity, but to strengthen our sense of being" (in Yokoboski 2000: 27). One strengthens one's sense of being by embarking on the endless adventure of exploration without exploitation, an adventure that does not seek to colonize or dominate, but rather to yield to the call of animals, plants, ghosts, elements, mere things. One has to establish this alliance not vertically, like a species of conquerors (humanity), but horizontally, as just another thing among the many other things of the earth—visible and invisible, physical or spectral, but always *teleplastically*, in unnatural assemblages. We can now understand why choreography, in their work, must become installation. First, because the creation of an aesthetics of horizontal permutations is

exactly what Perniola sees as the "the open horizon of installations," thanks to which the artwork flows beyond of itself, transgresses its own apparent limits, and fuses with the audience and the performers: "It is the installation that feels the visitor, welcomes him, touches him, feels him up, stretches out to him, makes him enter into it, penetrates him, possesses him, overwhelms him" (Perniola 2004: 107). Second, because transgressal limitrophy becomes the installing of a whole ecology predicated on untamed alliances. As Eiko & Koma say, what matters is "to be clear about what matters to us and to strengthen our *insistence*."[15] The serious-sensuous-sexual insistence of that *some thing* that feels. And still dances.

Notes

1 As early as in Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchesography* (1589) we can see how the lost nature of humans can be remediated by dance, as that built layer of non-natural behavior that supplements a defectual being: "dancing is practical to reveal whether lovers are in good health and sound of limb, after which they are permitted to kiss their mistress in order that they may touch and savour one another, thus to ascertain if they are shapely or emit a nonpleasent odour as of bad meat" (Arbeau 1967: 12). But it is in the eighteenth century that the aesthetic theory of dance becomes attuned to the governance of the human's lost nature, working as its corrective, since humans are perceived as being naturally defective. This is clearly stated in Jean-Georges Noverre's *Letters on Dancing* (1760): "to dance elegantly, to walk gracefully and to carry oneself nobly, it is imperative to reverse the order of things and force the limbs, by means of an exercise both long and painful, to take a totally different position from that which is natural to them," since human nature is essentially ungraceful, non-natural (Noverre and Beaumont 1966: 117). In the nineteenth century, the defectual nature of humans remains an important foundation for the very existence of dance. In Carlo Blasis' *The Code of Terpsichore* (1828), a daily regime of training prevents dancers into falling prey to the constitutive "defect that exists in the construction of your body" (Blasis 1976: 61). His advice to dancers: "do not rely on your own natural qualities," and "remain not, therefore, twenty-four hours without practicing" (51). The danger is the dancer returning to the natural-defectual condition of the human: "No other art demands a stricter attention to this particular; without it, he that has made himself perfect cannot long remain so; he soon loses part of what has cost him so much labor to acquire." Significantly, this natural-defectual nature of the body is what makes dance singular in its efforts: "This [need for daily training] is not the case with music and singing [...] nor painting" (50–51). In Isadora Duncan's text "The Dance of the Future" (written circa 1907) we can also find the identification of "the real source of the dance with nature." But note how, for Duncan, humanity has lost nature from its nature, and requires dance to find what it misses: "The movement of the free animals and birds remains always in correspondence to their nature [...]. It is only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restrictions placed upon them. So it has been with civilized man" (Duncan in Cohen and Matheson 1992: 124). In John Martin's *The Modern Dance* (1933) the proximity of "primitive man" to nature makes dance, on one hand, central to their lives, but at the same time, and interestingly, indicates once again how dance is the mark of humanity's severance from nature as well as humanity's only way to suture nature back into

human life: "Because in his dance [primitive man] expressed a feeling which was by no means peculiar to himself but was shared by all his fellows, they had no difficulty in following his intention and even joining him with him." For Martin, the civilizing process increases the divorce from this link with nature, and that is why "if we [i.e., modern humans] were astute enough and perceptive enough (which we are not) we could find in these rituals an incomparable treasure, for they are really the record of man's discovery of nature" (Martin 1965: 9–10). Again, dance expresses a nature that needs dance in order to re-discover what has been lost in "man": nature. Moreover, "this spirit is the animating spirit of the modern dance" (10). In Laban's *The Mastery of Movement* (1950) we see again the theme of the broken bond between humans and nature as prefacing a Biblical exposition of dance's and movement's functions in art (with Eve as main conceptual persona invoked right in the opening pages): "We never know whether man regards himself as taking part in a tragedy or a comedy with himself as the protagonist in the drama of existence and Nature forming the chorus. Yet it is an undeniable fact that man's extraordinary power of thought and action has placed him in a peculiar situation as far as his relationship to his surroundings is concerned" (Laban and Ullmann 1980: 5). The peculiarity of this situation carries Laban to a seventeen-page-long analysis of animal movements (wild and tamed) in contrast to human movements ("civilized" and "tribal") and, once again, repeating a Kleistian theme, the movement of "gods." As for Martha Graham, the cut with nature also implicates certain non-human animals, through the shared process of domestication, which severs non-human and human animals from grace and beauty. As she writes in 1926: "No animal ever has an ugly body until it is domesticated. It is the same with the human body" (Graham 1966: 35). Dance would return humans back to the body they have lost through their domesticity, after their fall from natural grace.

2 See also (Morin 1979).

3 First published in three installments in the *Berliner Abendblätter*, December 12–14, 1810.

4 There is a vast amount of scholarship dedicated to this particular text by Kleist. Especially useful in understanding the function of dance and animality are Bridges (2012), Cox (1986), Allan and Griffiths (2011), and Frederick (2013). An indispensible reading remains Paul de Man's astute yet anti-experiential analysis (1984). A recent book aligning the problematic of freedom (not mentioned in Kleist) and the motions of the puppet is Gray (2015).

5 Elizabeth Bridges (2012) reminds us that Kleist's text advocates a proto-cyborg corporeity for humans, describing a dancer endowed with a prosthetic leg who "can perform ... with a calmness, ease, and grace which amazes any thinking observer" (Kleist 1982: 240).

6 The evacuation of affect in dance is not just a literary invention. It does appear as a whole program for early nineteenth-century dance, as we can see, for instance, in Blasis, when he advises, in Kleistian terms, that a dancer searching for "gracefulness of every attitude into which he throws himself [...] let *no affectation intermingle with his dancing*; that would mar everything" (Blasis 1976: 65, emphasis added).

7 Thomas G. Neumuller's translation of Kleist's essay for *The Drama Review*'s 1972 "The Puppet Issue" opts for "single-mindedness" as opposed to "seriousness" (Kleist 1972 [1810]: 26). This far from accurate translation of "*Ernst*" forecloses the possibility of attributing a highest capacity for reasoning to the bear, of finding serious intentions in a non-human animal, which is precisely Kleist's counter-intuitive, non-anthropocentric point. Norman Paska's translation, however, also opts for "seriousness" (Kleist and Paska in Feher, Naddaff, and Tazi 1989: 420), as do several other translations into Portuguese, Spanish, and French.

8 In Deleuze's philosophy, the plane of consistency is isomorphic with the plane of immanence. Both must be built through the activation of a "movement (the facet of movement) which is established between the parts of each system and between one system and the other, which crosses them all, stirs them all up together" (Moulard-Leonard 2008: 143). Kleist's serious and unbeatably fast bear can always tell feint from truth since it not only prehends precisely what unfolds before it, but simultaneously co-builds its movement with all the other movements, crisscrossing the singularities in the situation. There is no temporal lag between its existence and the existence of matters and their velocities.

9 For Manning, the "elasticity of the almost is [...] a rare instance of an almost-actualization of the microperceptual within the actual. In the elastic moment, the movement becomes more-than, enveloping in its folds all of the potential of its pastness and its futurity" (2009: 115). I would suggest that perhaps such elasticity is "a rare instance" only to humans. For Kleist, it is the distinctive trait of the highest level of sensation, allowing a non-human capacity to *perceive the event of movement ahead of its actualization*.

10 For a discussion of movement and angelology, see Chapter 5.

11 The piece underwent some slight changes after its opening. My account is based on the performance I saw at the Hayward Gallery in November of 2010.

12 On individual spontaneous self-expression and micro-fascism see (Massumi, Boucher, and Prost 2010: 281) and (Lepecki 2015b).

13 This "after" is not only chronological in terms of the unfolding of the piece, but also implies a "going after," or a "following after" the singularities expressed by each element. Here, Derrida's notion that subjectivity simultaneously *is* and *follows* (after) the animal is crucial (Derrida 2008).

14 The poem is loosely based on Mitsuharu Kaneko's poem "The Seals." See, Akaboshi, Eiko. Program notes for *Fur Seal* (1977), http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=3016, accessed August 5, 2010.

15 Eiko & Koma. "Our Ambitions" in http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=2885, accessed August 5, 2010.

4 The body as archive

Will to reenact and the afterlives of dances

In his essay "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin considers how works of art are constituted by a kind of originary, radical incompleteness—one that, nevertheless, animates them, sends them off into endless future iterations, or translations, each of which would somehow unveil or actualize figments of potentiality not expressed in the "original." Thus the movement of works into their many futures and different expressions is literally one of being "carried across," i.e.: translated. Translation is not only the carrying of works across times and places, across languages and printings, but across new and transitive instantiations of their yet unlived lives. This means that the afterlives of artworks do not derive only from the fact that "a translation comes later than the original" (Benjamin 1996: 254). This lateness is already set in advance, it is futurity lying in the work itself, its potential energy. Benjamin identifies in every artwork, including their translations, what art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman calls "complex time" (Didi-Huberman 2002: 39).[1]

Benjamin's views on the entangled temporal complexities of a work's many futures had been influenced by the writings of the German art historian Aby Warburg, who called this complex temporality of artworks—their persistence in always moving across times, their insistence in not being confined ever to a single, supposedly originary, source "*Nachleben*"—survival, or more literally, afterlife. We find this same term appearing in Benjamin's essay on translation. For Benjamin, the movement of artworks towards their other lives was no poetic flight. As he wrote, "the idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with *an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity*" (Benjamin 1996: 254, emphasis added). And what was, for Benjamin, the most concrete "objectivity" when considering the afterlife of art works? The objectivity was difference: "No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For *in its afterlife*—which could not be called that if it were not a *transformation* and a *renewal* of something living—*the original undergoes a change*" (Benjamin 1996: 256, emphasis added). Here, it is not so much the obvious fact that any translation (i.e., any once again, with a difference) changes the original (into another language, into other bodies). It is rather, that every translation,

every carrying of a work to an afterlife beyond the work's original limits, also reflects back into the original, changing it, forever.

Rebecca Schneider writes, "entering, or reenacting, an event or a set of acts (acts of art or acts of war) from a critical direction, a different temporal angle, may be [...] an act of survival, of keeping alive *as* passing on" (Schneider 2011: 7). Thus, every work of art is always out of itself; its system of presence is such that, even in a live event, a performance art piece, a choreography, a happening, the fact remains "that there is no original event—or that there was, but it was never 'present' " as Amelia Jones remarks, when writing about reenactments in contemporary performance (Jones 2011: 19). If this is indeed the case, then Peggy Phelan's famous diagnosis that performance "disappears into memory" (Phelan 1993: 148) reveals itself to be exactly the one and same movement that presses performance forth into (its) futurities, to invoke José Muñoz's concept when writing on the queer temporality of performance as being one that is "not in the present" but on the horizon of extemporal futurities (Muñoz 2009: 97–99). In this sense, as Schneider argues, the particular survival, the afterlife, brought about by and through reenactments "is not a liveness considered always in *advance of death*, nor in some *after* death [...] rather, it is more a constant (re) turn of, to, from and between states of animation—an inter(in)animation" (Schneider 2011: 7). This is why we can say of any artwork, regardless of its medium, what Didi-Huberman has said of art history: it is never born, "it always rebegins" (2002: 11).

In performance, such constitutive rebeginning has both a weak, habitual-reproductive line, and a strong, fugitive-differentiating line. The former is present even in the least differing-oriented return of any live work—say in its daily reappearing as a repertoire piece in a dance or theater company, since any once-again already introduces all sorts of micro-differences even in the most stability-oriented piece. While the latter is inserted into the work by all those elements already in it that partake of an intrinsic criticality or critical move. This is why the differentiating notion of reenactment must keep its singularity and conceptual consistency. In this chapter, reenactment will be treated as a will for a critical augmentation of difference, as a critical differentiator operating on and through choreographic works and carrying them into their afterlives. Or, as Amelia Jones put it in an essay on the paradoxical politics of reenactments circa 2009, "the performative reenactment, when *critically engaged*, can remind us not only how closely all cultural expressions are tied to the marketplace in late capitalism, but of questions of history in relation to performance art that are extremely important politically" (Jones 2011: 42, emphasis added). With the notion of reenactment as a critically engaged force, how did its differential singularity inform experimental choreography in the late 2000s? How did it address the always-ambivalent relation dance has had with history, with dance's own passing away, and with historical time in general, given dance's insistence on its only time as the time of being present?

Indeed, we can see this ambivalence in French dance theorist and historian Laurence Louppe advancing the intriguing notion that the dancer is "the veritable avatar of Orpheus: he has no right to turn back on his course, lest he be denied the object of his quest" (Louppe 1994: 32). However, looking across the contemporary dance scene in Europe and the United States, one cannot escape the fact that dancers—contrary to Orpheus, contrary to Louppe's assertion—are increasingly turning back on their and dance history's tracks in order to find the "object of their quest." Indeed, contemporary dancers and choreographers in the United States and Europe have in recent years been actively engaged in creating reenactments of sometimes well-known, sometimes obscure, dance works of the twentieth century. Examples abound: we can think of Fabian Barba's *Schwingende Landschaft* (2008), an evening-length piece where the Ecuadorian choreographer returns to Mary Wigman's seven solo pieces created in 1929 and performed during Wigman's first US tour in 1930, or Anne Collod's 2008 return to Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes* (1965). Or, in an ever increased self-criticality in relationship to the reenacting act, Tino Seghal's *20 minutes for the 20 century* (1999) and several projects in Boris Charmatz' Dancing Museum, such as *expo zero* (2009) or *20 dancers for the 20th century* (2012). Furthermore, we can think as well of conferences and symposia in Europe such as "re.act.feminism" in several European cities including Berlin and Barcelona, 2009–14), or "Archive/Practice" at Dance Archive Leipzig, 2009; or in the United States "Re-constructions and Re-imaginations," at Performance Space 122 New York, 2009—all dedicated to the theme of reenactment in contemporary dance and performance—as well as a whole festival at Kaai Theater Brussels in February of 2010 entitled Re:Move, dedicated to reenacting and archiving in contemporary dance. And, we can think of the four choreographers I will be addressing in this essay: US choreographer and body artist Julie Tolentino's intensely corporeal archival project *The Sky Remains the Same* (an ongoing project initiated in 2008); Martin Nachbar's *Urheben Aufheben* (2008), in which the German choreographer activates Dore Hoyer's *Affectos Humanos* (1962/64); Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective*, where the French choreographer asks several dancers to research his own work and perform it in museum contexts (2012/15); and Richard Move's many returns since the early 1990s to several of Martha Graham's dance works (as well as to Graham's body).

Turning and returning to all those tracks and steps and bodies and gestures and sweat and images and words and sounds performed by past dancers paradoxically becomes one of the most significant marks of contemporary experimental choreography. With this question of returning as experimentation—of choreographically experimenting whether by turning back or in turning back dance may nevertheless still escape Orpheus' curse of being frozen in time—current dance re-enactments become privileged sites for exploring the theoretical and choreographic relations between experimental dance and its will to archive. While the recent interest in reenacting in dance parallels a similar one in recent performance art, and while in the

visual arts the term "archival impulse"—in which reenacting participates—was coined by Hal Foster to describe what he identified as "a pervasive" concern[2] (Foster 2004: 3), I propose that in order to probe reenactments in dance as a mark of experimentation that defines contemporaneity,[3] a concept must be introduced: a specifically choreographic "will to archive."

"Will to archive" echoes, yet differs from, Hal Foster's notion of "archival impulse" in contemporary art. Indeed, I would suggest that Foster's concept remains problematic for several reasons. Referring to an artist's "will 'to connect what cannot be connected'," equivalent to "a will to relate" and "to probe a *misplaced* past" (Foster 2004: 21, emphasis added), Foster defines "archival impulse" as directly resulting from a current "*failure* in cultural memory" produced by our "society of control" (2004: 21–22, 22 note 60, emphasis added). Ramsay Burt, writing on "recent dance performances that have used, cited, or re-appropriated historical material for new purposes" (Burt 2003: 34), similarly invoked, one year prior to the publication of Foster's essay, this double articulation between cultural memory lapses and current shifts from discipline societies to societies of control. Burt describes how "the effect of this shift from discipline towards control, a move that is particularly difficult for traditional dance institutions, can be seen at work within dance performances that use historical material" (2003: 35). This would seem like a theoretical move similar to Foster's. However, what I find crucially different in Burt's more nuanced approach to reenactments is how he understands this "effect" as a "*reactive* use of history" (37, emphasis added). Searching for nonreactive modes of activating performative approaches to history, Burt finds such approaches in dance reenactments of the early 2000s where an active (rather than reactive) and generative (rather than imitative) approach to "historical material" led dance reenactments to resist "the disciplinary and controlling structures of repressive, representational regimes" (Burt 2003: 39).[4]

Burt's identification of nonreactive forces in recent dance reenactments opens the possibility for critiquing one crucial component in Foster's "archival impulse": the supposedly "paranoiac" element in contemporary subjectivity wishing to connect to pasts that have been "misplaced" (Foster 2004: 22–23). When considered alongside Foster's already problematic understanding of pastness as locatable (spatialization of the past), his association of an artistic impulse to archive with a specific mental condition (psychologization of an artistic project) raises a few questions. Is it at all possible to affirm a past that is not always already "misplaced"? Is it possible to affirm any memory (cultural in particular) that does not somehow already "fail" to be fully present, and fully connected to the present? Is the paranoiac the only subject who can "connect"? Is archiving a paranoiac process about connecting with the past or is it, as Foucault so beautifully suggests in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), a system of *transforming simultaneously* past, present, and future—that is, a system for recreating a whole economy of the temporal?

I will address Foucault's proposals on archive in depth later in this essay, when discussing the work of Martin Nachbar and of Xavier Le Roy. For now, it is important to note that when faced with Foster's model, one fact remains: it is the archive itself—either as memory (cultural or personal) or as bureaucracy (cultural or political)—that predicates, from the start, its own onto-political performance as one of endless memory "failures"—thanks to its constitutive (and unavoidable) acts of exclusions and misplacements. By dictating what deserves a place in it, and what should be excluded from it, by determining what is to be properly filed and what is (purposefully or inadvertently) to be "misplaced" in it, the archive reveals itself as a true Foucauldian *dispositif*, "distributing the visible and the invisible, generating or eliminating an object which cannot exist without it" (Deleuze 2006: 339). It is important to note that despite the archive's onto-political capacity to "command" and to set up a whole system of "domiciliation" (Derrida 1995: 2) of its objects; despite any pervasive and current condition of historical alienation based on, but also producer of, failed and disconnected memories; despite the current transition from disciplinarian societies to "control societies" in contemporaneity,[5] the fact is that not all contemporary art—nor even art aimed at "connecting"—is propelled by and toward the archival. Moreover, it remains problematic to assign to works driven toward the archive an "impulse" coming from a specific subjectivity (even if this subjectivity does not describe a factual psychological trait of an artist but the general mode under which an artist operates under such an "archival impulse").

Writing on reenactments in recent performance art, Jessica Santone advanced another critique to Foster's concept of "archival impulse." Correctly stating that the question at hand is not of a "past that is incomplete" (as Foster suggests) but of a "history that is incomplete" (Santone 2008: 147), for Santone the archival question proposed by reenactments would be that of investigating the political-performative force of the (f)act of mediation in performance. Understanding reenactments as a performed mode of criticality in relation to performance's inevitable and tense relations with its own historicity, Santone views reenactments as performative modes of theorizing performance art's paradoxical relation to the document—echoing Rebecca Schneider's provocative notions of reenactments as "counter-memory" and "re-documenting" (Schneider 2001). My position differs from both Foster's and Santone's and, in one crucial aspect I will make clear in a moment, differs also from Burt's. With the expression "will to archive in contemporary dance," I am proposing an alternative affective, political, and aesthetic frame for recent dance reenactments—as well as for their relations to archival forces, impulses, or systems of command. Rather than "prob[ing] a misplaced past" in order to "connect so feverishly" what appears to us "so frightfully disconnected" in our historically alienated condition (Foster 2004: 21–22) (as if historical and political alienation were a novelty in the history of Western societies); rather than creating a "work that repeats and

multiplies an historical idea, inflecting its image through a *nostalgic* lens" predicated on a "drive to produce documentation"[6] (Santone 2008: 147), I am suggesting that the current will to archive in dance, as performed by reenactments, derives neither exclusively from "a failure in cultural memory" nor from "a nostalgic lens." I am proposing "will to archive" as referring to a capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of "impalpable possibilities" (to use an expression from Brian Massumi [2002: 91]). These fields of virtual "abstraction pertaining to the thing in general" (and to artworks in particular, I would add), these fields that "concern the possible" (Massumi 2002: 93), are always present in any past work and are that which reenactments activate.

This activation is a matter of creating "compossibles" and "incompossibles"—two terms from Leibniz describing the infinite inventivity of the monad. As Gilles Deleuze explains, "compossibles can be called (1) the totality of converging and extensive series that constitute the world, (2) the totality of monads that convey the same world. [...] Incompossibles can be called (1) the series that diverge, and that from then on belong to two possible worlds, and (2) monads of which each express a world different from the other" (Deleuze 1993: 60). I am proposing that the current will to archive operates in a similar manner—one reenacts not to fix a work in its singular (originating) possibilization but to unlock, release, and actualize a work's many (virtual) com- and incompossibilities, which the originating instantiation of the work kept in reserve, virtually. Significantly, and according to Deleuze, both modes of "possibles" in Leibniz operate as "recollections that try to become embodied" and "exert pressure" toward and on actualization (Deleuze 1991: 71).

Because of these pressures toward *embodied* actualizations, every will to archive in dance must lead to a will to reenact dances. Such an indissociable link means that each "will" acts upon the other to redefine what is understood by "archiving" and what is understood by "reenacting." This redefining action is carried out through a common articulator: the dancer's body. As we will see in the three choreographic projects discussed in this essay, in dance reenactments there will be no distinctions left over between archive and body. The body is archive and archive a body. This is Julie Tolentino's explicit point of departure for her series *The Sky Remains the Same*.

The Sky Remains the Same

American choreographer Julie Tolentino, in her series *The Sky Remains the Same* 2008 and ongoing), proposes her body as a living archive for works by several performance artists and choreographers, such as Ron Athey, Franko B, David Rousseve, and David Dorffman. I will refer to the first installment of the series, which I saw in Berlin in June of 2009, as part of the festival IN TRANSIT—Resistance of the Object I was curating then. The piece Tolentino performed had a very simple and very effective

compositional device. Tolentino chose one work by performance artist Ron Athey (*Self-Obliteration #1* [2007]) to archive onto (into?—the preposition remains uncertain in Tolentino's language, and this uncertainty must remain open) her body. This bodily archiving process takes place literally before an audience and literally as a reenacting. As the audience enters the space, it finds Ron Athey and Julie Tolentino naked, on their knees, each on a raised metal platform and facing each other. Athey initiates the whole archival process by performing *Self-Obliteration #1* alone. On all fours, Athey starts combing the long blond hair of a wig that totally covers his face. After repeating this action for a few minutes, Athey removes the wig, reveals his face, and starts to pull out from under his shaved head's skin pre-placed pins and needles. Blood spurts immediately. In a kind of downward dog pose, Athey lets his blood drip on two large rectangular glasses placed on the platform—a deeply corporeal variation of drip- and action-painting. After bleeding and drip-painting with his blood, Athey starts to manipulate heavy panes of glass against his shaved head and naked body, smudging blood on the glass.

His excruciating effort now becoming apparent, as waves of tremors crisscross his body, Athey lies on his back and continues to manipulate the two panes of glass so that the blood staining them becomes imprinted back onto his skin. He trembles, blood keeps spurting, some in the audience squat down, some avert the gaze, some cannot take in the piece. Dizzy, I lower my head a few times. Yet, before Athey, a presence remains fully alert, poised, focused. A presence that will not avert full witnessing: the archiving body of Julie Tolentino. Her attentive stillness echoes the audience's silence—which is as thick as Athey's coagulating blood on the glass surfaces and on his skin. *Self-Obliteration #1* ends with Athey placing each of the two smudged panes of glass vertically on slots at both ends of the platform. Athey puts on the wig again and lies down between the two blood-stained glasses framing him. The piece's final image uncannily mixes monument and meat. Throughout Athey's performance, Tolentino's still presence is complex and multiple in its functions: she becomes simultaneously an audience member, a student of the piece, an archivist, a potential archive, a performer, a partner, an enabler, a mirror-image, a double, a differentiator, an assimilator....

After completing his piece, covered in blood, panting, Athey gathers himself, goes back to the initial position, re-inserts the pins and needles in his temples, puts on the blond wig, grabs the comb, and re-starts *Self-Obliteration #1*. This second time around, Tolentino joins Athey by performing the work along/before/with/for him. It is in and by the originating artist's non-Orphic, non-nostalgic, and certainly non-paranoiac re-turn to a piece already performed, it is during and thanks to Athey's repetition, which is re-repeated by Tolentino, that the archiving of the work into/onto Tolentino's body takes place. Tolentino insists that what she performs—which could perhaps be more simply described as, for instance, "learning

Figure 4.1 Ron Athey performing *Self-Obliteration #1* in Julie Tolentino's *The Sky Remains the Same*. 2008. Photo: Leon Mostovoy. Courtesy of the artist.

someone else's piece in front of an audience," or "imitating another artist's work of art," or "appropriating someone's work in front of an audience"—is not at all aimed at adding a new performance to her repertoire; rather, it is explicitly aimed at *turning her body into an archive*. As she wrote to me, "The series should only have one ending—meaning I offer to 'archive' [the works] for my own life's duration. The artists will make note of any changes to this duration within our contract. I plan to collect these archived works over the next years—another series of artists will be announced soon—however, focusing on these first. Challenging and exciting all."[7]

Even if the sky remains the same, Julie Tolentino, collector of bodies, pieces, affects, and movements, will not. Through Tolentino's immediate reenacting of a piece in order to corporeally archive it (for her life's duration), Athey's performance does not disappear into the past but zooms into the all-encompassing field of the possible defined by that indetermination that is a body. Athey's piece rushes into yet to be actualized afterlives, into the multiple, unmetaphorical, objective reality of the virtual incarnated in a body.[8] Tolentino's body becomes the living archive of what, one day, will come back around—as it passes away. Dance.

Why does Tolentino need to call these particular and highly effective dramaturgical and choreographic processes "archiving"? Why this particular word, rather than "learning," "imitating," "copying," "appropriating,"

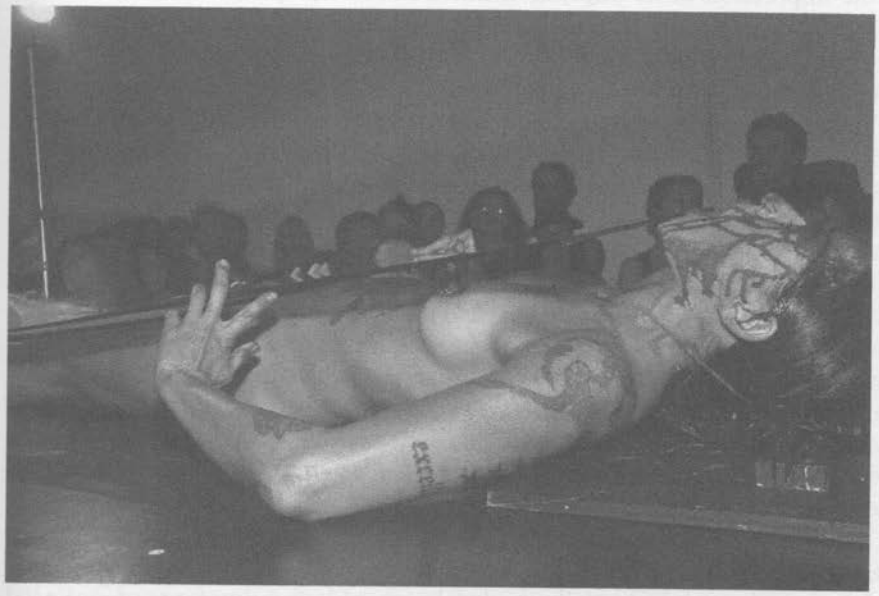

Figure 4.2 Julie Tolentino archiving Ron Athey's *Self-Obliteration #1* in *The Sky Remains the Same*. 2008. Photo: Leon Mostovoy. Courtesy of the artist.

or simply "doing" another artist's work? Tolentino's emphasis on the word and the concept of "archive" is of interest, for the question of archiving *onto/into one's body* brings us back to the problems surrounding the cenotaphic affect in Western dance. Indeed, why recur to the most moving support, the most precarious support, a human body, in order to archive? Why add to the archival project the hyper-mobility and the series of paradoxical temporalizations proper to the body—this multivalent system of plural velocities and arrests, shadowed by the veilings and drifts in perception and in things, tricked by the parapraxes of language, cursed with bad memory, and grounded on the certainty of death? A possible answer can be found in the link Tolentino explicitly makes between archiving, excorporation and incorporation, and reenacting. This link explicitly foregrounds how Tolentino's will to archive is performed as will to reenact, thus indicating the body as *the* privileged archival site. In its constitutive precariousness, perceptual blind-spots, linguistic indeterminations, muscular tremors, memory lapses, bleedings, rages, and passions, the body as archive re-places and diverts notions of archive away from a documental deposit or a bureaucratic agency dedicated to the (mis)management of "the past." With her emphasis on body-archiving, an endless mobility emerges as constitutive of this particularly transformative, particularly performative "archive without archive, where suddenly indiscernible from

the impression of its imprint, Gradiva's footstep speaks by itself!" to use Derrida's phrase, where archive and dancing fuse in compossibilization (Derrida 1995: 98).

The body as archivist is one thing. The body as archive is quite another. Tolentino's project performs an intriguing short-circuiting of all sorts of pre-conceptions about what a document is, while revealing what a body might have always been: a body may have always already been nothing other than an archive. If this is the case, it means that we need to understand current dance reenactments as a mode of performance that has a *consistency* of its own. In a vein similar to Vanessa Agnew, when she proposed that reenactments are "a form of affective history" (Agnew 2007: 301), I would suggest that the performativity of the will to archive in *The Sky Remains the Same* considers and reveals how reenacting is an affective mode of historicity that harnesses futurities by releasing pastness away from its many archival "domiciliations"—and particularly from that major force in a work's forced domiciliation: the author's intention as commanding authority over a work's afterlives.

Reenactments transform all authored objects into fugitives in their own home. The paradox is that reenactments, because they seem to return somehow to a past and an origin, need to bypass the arresting force of authorial authority, which would fix this re-turn truly into an Orphic arrest. Thus the political-ethical imperative for reenactments not only to reinvent, not only to point out that the present is different from the past, but to invent, to create—because of returning—something that is new and yet participates fully in the virtual cloud surrounding the originating work itself—while bypassing an author's wishes as last words over a work's destiny. This is one of the political acts re-enacting performs as reenactment: it suspends economies of authoritative authors who want to keep their works under house arrest. To reenact would mean to disseminate, to spill without expecting a return or a profit. It would mean to expel, to expropriate, to excorporate under the name of a promise called giving. In other words, reenactments enact the promise of the end of economy. They make dance return, only to give it away—as an author's blood spilled twice for the sake of self-obliteration.

Urheben Aufheben

German choreographer Martin Nachbar's *Urheben Aufheben* (2008) is an evening-length dance piece explicitly addressing the will to reenact as will to archive. A choreographic-theoretical reflection on the particular ways archival forces are deployed in and by dance, it is an artwork whose life is driven by an irresistible call placed by a 1967 film of German choreographer Dore Hoyer dancing her 1962/64 solo series titled *Affectos Humanos*.

How does Nachbar answer this call (coming not from "the past," but from the present instantiation of an encounter between himself and a

film excorporating *Affectos Humanos*) and start his piece? He enters into the stage by pushing in a blackboard, which reads: "Urheben Aufheben—An Applied Research." After positioning the blackboard downstage left, Nachbar stands next to it, faces his audience and states: "Step one: Entering into the Archive."

How does he enter into the archive? By calmly walking a couple of steps more onto the stage and starting to run in wide circles backwards. In other words, Nachbar enters the archive by re-turning, like an anti-Orpheus. By running backwards in circles, only seemingly does he go nowhere—because by running in the same place, Nachbar defines a border, a lip of time. And what does Nachbar find in his backward turns as he turns to the archive and defines its contours? Literally affects: *Affectos Humanos*—the film shot in 1967 (the year Hoyer died). It is almost uncanny how *Urheben Aufheben* explicitly invokes Spinoza—the philosopher who defined the body in terms of affects and who understood the body as a set of velocities, intensities, and capacities of affecting and being affected—in other words, the body as a dynamic system of excorporations and incorporations of those velocities and affects.[9]

So, Nachbar picked up something ("to pick up" is one of the meanings of the German word *aufheben*) from the virtual cloud of dance history, followed the path of that something, found Waltraud Luley, a former Hoyer dancer who was authorized to teach the piece, and learned it from her, as best he could—even though, as she told him, he had the wrong body. Nachbar's reenactment has a long history. In an earlier version titled *Affects/Rework* (2000), Nachbar collaborated with choreographers Thomas Plischke and Alice Chauchat, all members of the collective B.D.C. This earlier version included a solo by Plischke, a video of him shaving, the voice of Chauchat, and three danced "affects" performed by Nachbar from Hoyer's five. In the more recent *Urheben Aufheben*, Nachbar performs solo and dances four of the "affects" (Vanity, Desire, Hate, and Fear) while marking and describing the last one (Love). In both pieces, however, there is a similar point of departure: by picking up Hoyer's dances only to keep them corporeally, Martin performed a return—but one confounding the strict circularity of proper economy, since this return also suspended (another meaning of the word *aufheben*) Hoyer's authorial force by augmenting the force coming from the work itself. As Nachbar wrote to me about the meaning of the title of the piece, "Urheben Aufheben is a play with words and can mean three things: 1. To pick something created up from the floor. 2. To keep it. 3. To suspend the notion of authorship."[10] The whole evening is structured around Nachbar narrating how the process of creating the new work unfolded first as a search and then as research. His narrative is interrupted (or joined) only by the four dances already mentioned and the description/marking of the dance-affect Love.

At a certain point in his performance, as Nachbar summarizes the three steps he had to go through in order to get "into the archive," as he put it,

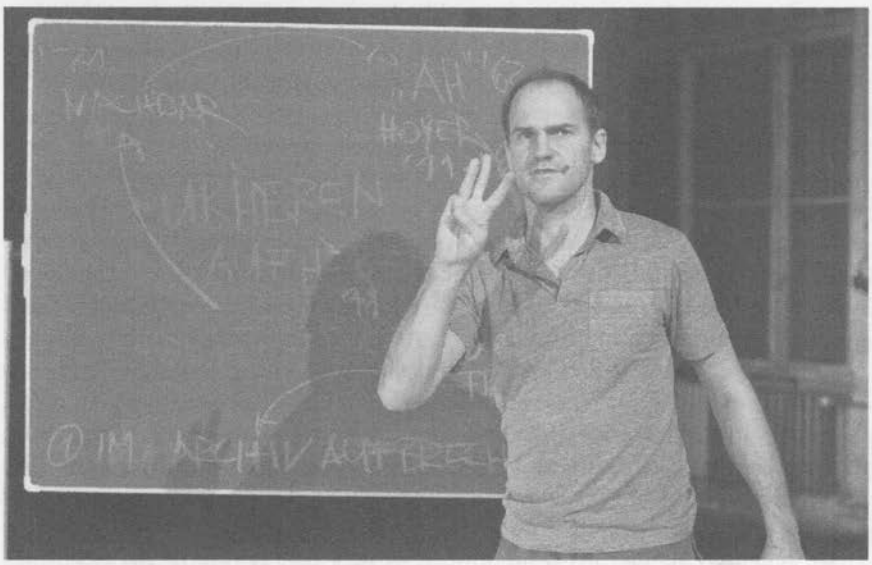

Figure 4.3 Martin Nachbar. *Urheben Aufheben*. 2008. Photo: Gerhard Ludwig. Courtesy of the artist.

he makes a profound statement. This is what he tells us at a certain point in the piece:

> Ok, let's go back to the beginning: we had [the sections] "Entering the Archive," "Applied Recollection" and "Storehouse" [*Lager*]. Now, what happens, if I don't just visit the storehouse but try to push my body into it and at the same time, allow the storehouse to push itself into my body? Maybe the storehouse will be systematized and become an archive. And then the archive will become visible through my body. So, when these three elements connect and form a critical point: What will happen? What will come out at the other side of this point?[11]

A "critical point" is another name for "singularity," that is to say, another name for actualization, which in turn is "a kind of displacement by which the past is embodied only in terms of a present that is different from that which it has been" (Deleuze 1991: 71). Deleuze's description of the actualization of singularities as embodiment is, in many ways, similar to Nachbar's description of how archival particles went through his body and how his body went through archival particles and this movement formed a critical point from which something else could come out. For Deleuze, what "comes out" of a singularity or critical point is, simply, an event.[12] What would be the event Nachbar creates with his reenactment of Hoyer's work?

It is the event of compossibility: the creation of the conditions for *Affectos Humanos* to pass through new possibilizations that Hoyer could not offer to it, could not actualize, even as she authored the work. In other words, the event is to have *Affectos Humanos* pass through a compossible becoming. But how does Nachbar reach, or create, or drill, or summon this critical point—which is both choreographic and corporeal? As he tells us during the performance, he does so by creating a system of excorporations and incorporations, transmissions and alliances, between archives and bodies, and to such a degree that both archives and bodies start to fuse into one another to finally become each other. Let me repeat, and now emphasize, what Nachbar had just said to his audience: "Now, what happens, if I don't just visit the storehouse but try *to push my body into it and at the same time, allow the storehouse to push itself into my body*? [...]. *then the archive will become visible through my body.*"

Pushing the body into the archive, pushing the archive into the body—a mutual metamorphosis conjuring up, creating, secreting, excreting, inflecting critical points where virtuals and actuals exchange place. Used as a metamorphic concept, Nachbar's understanding of archive resonates vividly with the concept of "archive" developed by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. What is archive, for Foucault, in that book? He writes: "By this term I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity; nor do I mean the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation" (1972: 128–129). So the archive, for Foucault, is not a thing, not a recipient, not a building, nor a box, nor a filing system. Foucault adds: "It does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries" (130). Rather, the archive is "the general system of formation and *transformation of statements*" (130, emphasis added). What are statements for Foucault? As Deleuze explains in his book *Foucault*, statements are neither phrases nor propositions, but "a multiplicity" (Deleuze 1988a: 6) animated non-personologically by "a secret repetition," and therefore "a literary form, a scientific proposition, a common phrase, a schizophrenic piece of non-sense and so on are also statements." It is the archive that operates upon statements as a "disjunctive" force, giving "archeology" (or, *arkhé-logos*, the logic interlinking orientation, sense, meaning, perception, and sensation) a double task: "it must open up words, phrases and propositions, open up qualities, things and objects" (Deleuze 1988: 20). This is why Foucault says that this "general system" of disjunction and transformation that is the archive, turns "statements" into "*events* and *things*" (Foucault 1972: 128, emphasis added). Similarly, choreography is also a dynamic system of transmission and of transformation, an archival-corporeal system that also turns *statements*—such as "Person 1 walks slowly along corridor, stops at entrance 5 secs, walks slowly in a straight line ..." (excerpted from

Allan Kaprow's score for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* [1959]); or "The left arm is extended sideways and drawn a little backwards, but in line with the pit of the body" (excerpted from Pierre Rameau, *The Dancing Master* [1725]); or "Stand in 5th, right foot behind. Relevé on left foot with right leg in 2nd, single or double *rond de jambe*, and close right foot front" (excerpted from Joyce Mackie, *Basic Ballet* [1999])—into corporeal events and kinetic things. That is to say, because it is a system of transformation, the archive is in itself a critical point, a singularity—squeezing out actuals from the virtual cloud, and secreting back virtuals from the actuals; turning corporeal events into kinetic things, corporeal things into kinetic events.

But how can we access the archive, enter the archive, if the archive is not a "storehouse"—as Nachbar says during his piece, echoing Foucault—but indeed a system? The answer is: only choreographically. For if choreography knows something, it is that an archive does not store: it acts. And its actions take place primarily by delimiting zones of temporality and rhythms of presence—just as choreography must: "The analysis of the archive, then, involves a privileged region: at once close to us, and different from our present existence, *it is the border of time which surrounds our presence*, which overhangs it, and which indicates its otherness; *it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us*" (Foucault 1972: 130, emphasis added). These zones, or regions, or dimensions form and transform not only our notions but our very *experiences* of time, presence, identity, alterity, body, memory, past, future, subjectivity.

The archive as border becomes the vertiginous skin where all sorts of onto-political "re-writings" (Foucault 1972: 140) take place, including the re-writing of movement, including the re-writing of the archive itself. As Nachbar tells us halfway into *Urheben Aufheben*, "I go into the archive and a difference emerges, the archive gets messed up. At the same time it becomes visible through my body [...]. My body makes the archive visible and at the same time, creates this difference."

Like the body, like subjectivity, the archive is dispersion, expelling, spilling, differentiation; a foaming and a forming and a transforming of statements into events, of things into words, and of virtuals into actuals (and vice versa). If, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault is primarily concerned with the analysis of the systematic transformations endured by "statements" and "discursive practices" (1972: 135) his discussion of archive includes moments where more embodied practices make an appearance, and where identity and subjectivity are clearly invoked as central to the archival system of transformation. Thus, Foucault mentions how the archive "dissipates that temporal *identity* in which *we* are pleased *to look at ourselves*" and "it establishes that *we are* difference" (131, emphasis added).

Identification, identity, notions of selfhood and even of perception and self-perception—as much as statements and discourses—endure the same process of transformation established by the archive's operations. Moreover, the self that is referred to in the expression "our selves" is cast

as essentially performative and theatrical since the archive establishes that "our selves [are] the difference of masks" (131). This multiple and multiplying active differentiation, operating in statements and discourses, but also in identity, in ways of looking at ourselves and of understanding our selves as masquerade, is simultaneously subjective, ontological, and performative. Its discovery: "That difference, far from being the forgotten or recovered origin, is this *dispersion* that we *are* and *make*" (Foucault 1972: 131, emphasis added).

Let's consider for a moment the political implications of this making-dispersion that, for Foucault, we already *are*. Let's consider it in the particular field of choreography and through the particular practices of dancing in this field. Finally, and following Foucault's suggestion, let's consider the question of dispersion not in relation to a misfiled, mis-archived origin but as the onto-political performativity of the archive, that which turns it into something other than a storehouse or cenotaph of past movements.

Gabriele Brandstetter, in her essay "Choreography as Cenotaph," used a term that I have been using so far in this essay without defining it properly. Since this term allows for identifying non-melancholic, or non-lamentational, kinds of affect in the current will to archive as will to reenact in experimental dance, I would like to push it now to its conceptual limits since it will help articulate all three projects under discussion in regard to this body-archive. The term is "excorporation," and Brandstetter proposed that dance happens (we can say, that dance dances) thanks to an ongoing dialectics of incorporations and "excorporations" (Brandstetter 2000: 102).

I would like to take Brandstetter's proposition further and add that in such dialectics, all sorts of bodies (human, textual, architectural, representational) involved in the (f)act of dancing expel and internalize each other's forces, surfaces, velocities, and modes. In this circulation and exchange, what turns and returns, and what in this movement is perhaps surpassed, transformed, dispersed, is the melancholic or cenotaphic notion that dance is that which *only* passes away. Instead, to understand dance as a dynamic, transhistorical, and intersubjective system of incorporations and excorporations is to understand dance not only as that which *passes away* (in time and across space) but also as that which passes around (between and across bodies of dancers, viewers, choreographers) and as that which also, always, *comes back around*. Dance is the passing around and the coming around of corporeal formations and transformations by means of excorporations and incorporations of jets of affects (or jets of affective singularities).

Thanks to transformative exchanges of steps and sweat, thanks to ongoing transmissions of images and resonances, choreography allows dancers to turn and return on their tracks in order to dance via ex- and incorporations. This kind of dynamics founds a particular economy, where bodies intertwine, or intermingle, across time—in an endless chain of reciprocal emissions, transmissions, receptions, and exchanges of times, gestures, steps, affects, sweat, breathing, historical and political particles. Under this transformative

system of excorporations and incorporations, the afterlife of dance works gains a new objectivity, bypassing melancholia as its main affect, its main drive or nostalgic impulse. What exactly do bodies exchange in this non-melancholic choreographic economy of transmission? Again, they exchange modes of compossibilization and of incompossibilization of a supposedly past work, which is never, ever, dead. Instead it is always moving.

Retrospective

In all of these works there is not a desire for reproductive adherence to an original, but the deep understanding that every origin is always in a deep state of turbulent becoming. Every supposedly stable origin is actually time being worked. As French choreographer Xavier Le Roy says when discussing his piece *Product of Other Circumstances* (2009), based on several archival materials of different Butoh dances, the artist working retrospectively on an archival source must be a "differentiator." As he explains, "the romantic artist is traditionally expected to come with an idea out of nowhere, ex nihilo. My view is that it is always about differentiating something you take part in, rather than being on the outside"(in Cvejic 2014: 233). In other words: the artist can only reenact that in which the source material, in the "original," is already operating for and as differentiation.

Le Roy also expands this remark while conversing with philosopher, dramaturg, and dance theorist Bojana Cvejic on his major work *Retrospective*—an exhibition conceived as a durational choreography of actions all of which are drawn from Le Roy's previous solo work. First performed at Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona (2012), it has since then been presented in several venues and museums worldwide including Dancing Museum, Rennes (2012), Festival Interação e Conectividade VII, Salvador (2013), MAR, Rio de Janeiro (2013), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2014) and MoMA PS1, New York (2014).

In *Retrospective*, Le Roy's choreographic and compositional procedures are simple, and yet they profoundly trouble the very notion of archival stability. Once again, it will be the dancers' bodies that will become the archive, precarious and singular systems of transformation, from which movement and gestures, choreography and words, will spring into (differentiated) action.[13]

As the museum visitors enter the main space (*Retrospective* is usually divided into three main rooms, I will call them the "performance" room, the "archival room," and the "dark room"), they will find three dancers distributed along different walls of the room. As every new visitor enters, the dancers immediately stop what they are doing and quickly exit the room, leaving the visitor perhaps a bit lost, as if just arriving at the end of something. But soon the same dancers re-enter the space, and it becomes clear that the end just witnessed was but a (re)beginning, perhaps a new or not so new starting again of a choreographic "machine" set up by Le Roy. So, one dancer goes against one of the walls and enters into a position, perhaps from *Self Unfinished* (1998); another dancer, along another wall, performs in a

loop a short choreographic sequence, say from *Product of Circumstances* (1999); and the third dancer will approach the newly arrived visitor or visitors and address them directly, will start sharing with them a story. As Le Roy describes this direct interaction between dancer and public:

> the [dancer's] narration will consist, in my proposal to each performer, in developing what I call their own *Retrospective* of my works. [...] They will choose excerpts of my solo works to perform, and between the excerpts they will walk to the visitors and address them with a story that relates the dates of the works they are citing as well as their personal stories.
>
> (in Cvejic 2014: 247)

If *Retrospective* works as archive, and indeed includes an entire room filled with materials we commonsensically identify as being a "proper" archive (i.e., computer terminals with properly identified video files of the works being performed during *Retrospective*, dossiers containing exact information on the works, etc.), it works as a highly Foucaultian one, since all "the material of the work" (all of Le Roy's solos up to then) "could be distorted or transformed" (in Cvejic 2014: 25). As one of the dancers in *Retrospective* at Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, Germany in 2013 confided to a reviewer:

> Xavier proposed to each of us to make our own *Retrospective* by mixing movement and word in a complementary fashion [...]. We alternate these solos with our own gestures, with our own lives. Object and subject at the same time. It is more freeing than theater conventions: we have more relation with the people, and that frees us.
>
> (Lequeux 2013: n.p.)

Having seen two instances of *Retrospective*, one at Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona, and the other at MAR in Rio de Janeiro, I remember distinctly this shared sensation of *freeing* the works through the witnessing of Le Roy's solos being activated not only by different dancers' bodies, but by other dancers' *life experiences*.

In a conversation with Bojana Cvejic, specifically on why he had decided to work only with solo materials for *Retrospective*, Le Roy is a bit hesitant in giving a reason. Given that all the solo works had been originally performed by Le Roy himself, I suggest that one of the reasons is to take the opportunity to let the archival operate as a cut of the authorial anchoring. To have the archive let the solos pass through that ultimate singularity, another *life*, in order to re-emerge back (or forth) into the world as some other concretion, as the renewed expression of a sometimes highly improbable, unique, encounter. This is how an archived dance, a dormant choreographic score, becomes event: through an ethics and aesthetics of

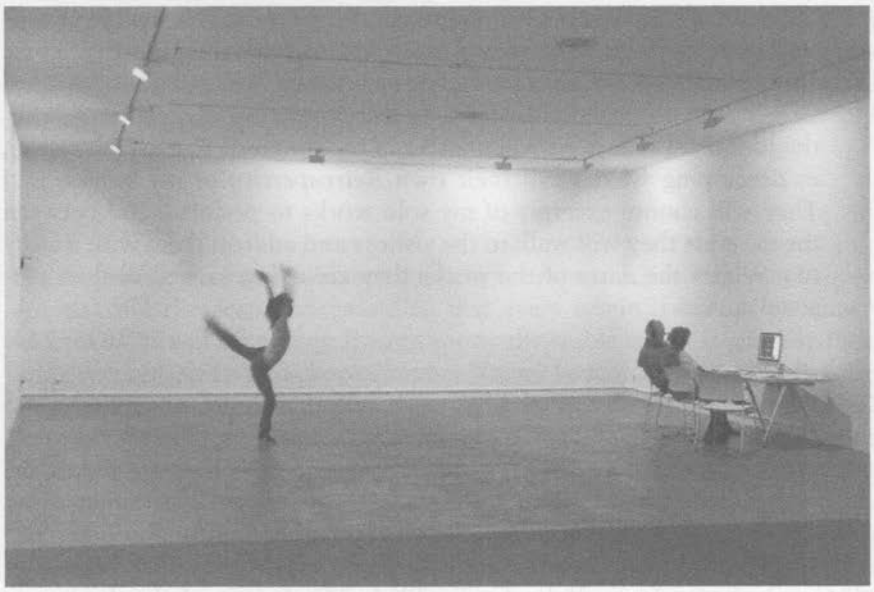

Figure 4.4 The "archive room" in Le Roy's *Retrospective* at Tàpies Foundation. 2012. Photo: Lluís Bover. Courtesy of the artist and Tàpies Foundation.

archeo-metabolism, the exposure of archives as systems of metabolic transformation, always necessarily de-individualized.

We saw earlier how the archive in Foucault is predicated on the concrete reality of statements. Gilles Deleuze notes how one of the traits of the Foucauldian concept of statement is that "it always represents a transmission of particular elements distributed in a corresponding space. [...] The formations and transformations of the spaces themselves pose topological problems that cannot adequately be described in terms of creation" (Deleuze 1988: 3). Le Roy is particularly candid in his procedures of reconsidering the archival not as a stable topology or hermetic container of past events, but as active "system of transformation." For him, the archive *is* a differentiator, just as the artist who reenacts or retrospects. As he confesses to Bojana Cvejic, "I failed at repeating the same, but I somehow repeated the difference" (in Cvejic 2014: 158). This highly Deleuzian sentence is what aligns repetition not only with "the thought of the future" (Deleuze 1994: 9) but repetition as the very possibility of *making* new futures. The future becomes the activation of repeated difference in order "to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it" since "difference inhabits repetition" (Deleuze 1994: 76).

But what of the notion of original? If the original is not originary foundation but already in itself a differentiator calling for the new to emerge

thanks to an embracing of its persistence in remaining in difference to itself, as itself, this is because the original is never a stable ground but a turbulent *spring*. This is Walter Benjamin's insight, anticipating Deleuze, supplementing in advance and calling forth Foucault, when in the introduction to his *Origins of the German Tragic Drama* Benjamin discusses the dialectics original/restoration and finds in it not an antagonism but, as Didi-Huberman explains, "the *reciprocal determination* of the unique *and* of repetition" (Didi-Huberman 2002: 57):

> The origin [*Ursprung*] is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the very matter involved in the process of generation. [...] On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something that is in itself imperfect and incomplete, always open. [...] Origin does not, therefore, emerge from established facts, but *it touches their pre- and post-history*.
>
> (Benjamin 2003: 45, translation modified, emphasis added)

Always unstable and always unfinished original sources do not fall back into their own self-identity but crest forth only to swerve around the present, bypassing it, and simultaneously also recede back thus reaching out to futures and yet-to-come moments. Through this simultaneous touching of the pre- and post- the cresting movement of any original source expresses the fact that any present event at the time of its (re)actualization is both past and future; all reenacting is therefore a fusion of the unique and of that which, in the unique, is repetition.

What is an artist concerned with the activation of past works supposed to do but to recognize that his works' *retrospective re-activation* must always be also *prospective actualization* of their differential potentialities, in the always cresting springing of their constitutively broken and incomplete nature? This is why, in *Retrospective*, the choreographer-differentiator offers us all (the dancers, the audiences, the works) at least three overlapping modes of regimenting time, in what he calls *Retrospective*'s compositional "set of heterochronies" (Le Roy in Cvejic 2014: 27): "the loop," "immobility," and "linear time" (Le Roy in Cvejic 2014: 25–27, 247, 298). It is at least in these three sets that we experience a major part of *Retrospective*. And yet ... lurking underneath, in the exhibition's underbelly, another time obscurely hums. It is absolutely peculiar and odd that *Retrospective* has the interactive space of experiencing the works with the dancers (the large exhibition room), of learning and studying the works also with dancers and other audience members, sometimes even with Le Roy (the archive-rehearsal room), being supplemented by a pitch black dark room. Inside this room, also clad in dark grey clothes, three inert human size dolls, "lying on the floor, with and without puppet strings" (Le Roy in Cvejic 2014: 21).

Here, no animation, no light, no sound, no speech. It is as if this dark room is the archive's archive, one of those "mute witnesses or dark precursors [*précurseurs sombre*] which do everything" (Deleuze 1994: 256) that fuels and feeds, in infra-thinly vibrational darkness, all the inter-animation taking place above it, in the social field of light and heterochronic exchanges. In Barcelona, I entered into this dark room without really knowing where I was getting myself into, and spent a lot of time in there. Having no idea what it was supposed to be, to represent or do, first I just thought the dark room was a commentary on the way normative notions of contemporary archivization necessitate a permanent field of light—Le Roy's own critique of enlightened knowledge formations. It was only after a good while in the room that the dark grey silhouette of one of the puppets, sitting on the floor, back leaning against the wall, barely a foot away from me, started to stand out against the pitch-black darkness. In a jolt, I murmured some apology, thinking it was another person resting. No reply came and I stepped out, nervous. Looking sideways on my way out, I then perceived another figure, or lump of inert grey. I got right back in again. And rechecked what might be going on in that darkness. Or not going on. Or maybe going back and forth and sideways and transversely, all at the same time, across the darkness, under choreography, next to the studio-archive, through that other vestibule of transformation in darkness' full potentiality (see Chapter 2).

The dark room with the three puppets is a direct reference to Le Roy's 2005 piece *Untitled*, a work for blackbox stage where, without any authorship revealed, three human size puppets (the size of Xavier Le Roy) are manipulated in total darkness, the only light on stage being cast by flashlights previously distributed to the audience. Without publicly acknowledged authorship, *Untitled* remains a singular work not only in Le Roy's production, but in *Retrospective*. What, if any, could be its function in it, besides ensuring the conceptual coherence of *Retrospective* being made of all of Le Roy's solo works until 2012 – even though *Untitled*'s authorial orphanage would somehow justify its absence? (*Untitled* is performed by a proxy, who, in the after show talks, presents himself as answering on behalf of "the author.")

In an interview with Xavier Le Roy, performance studies scholar Adrian Heathfield observes how this dark room has a "pro-spective, or a future-spective" function. Heathfield's astute insight prompts Le Roy's observation: "It's producing something: just like the idea of going back is interesting for me, if it transforms the past into something else" (in Solomon 2015: 83). So the dark room produces both pasts and futures, bypasses the present, and yet insists on the uncanny reality effect it produces, inevitably, even on its author. As Le Roy says, "the uncanniness of this strange thing, this border of, 'Is it alive? Is it dead? Is it an object? Is it a subject? Is it handicapped? Is it normal?' " (in Solomon 2015: 82). Heathfield presses forth his observation to its maximal consequence, which he conveys to Le Roy: "I started to read this third dark room as if it were *an exhibit from a future*

time looking back on the work: as if it were the future of the work in human consciousness. What is retained is something with indeterminate movement and humanness ..." (in Solomon 2015: 83). The indeterminate: pure potentiality in the dark space where an inert dance re-calls the limits of time. For this is the future *and* past of any archive: cryptic dark matter at the limits of history. In between, only differentiation and transformation. In between, only archival bodies, only metabolic hauntings: mixing history, persistence, transformation, and survival.

"Dragging Martha back from the dead"

With Foucault's notion of a transformative archive, and the notion of dance as a system of incorporating excorporations and excorporating incorporations, I would like to invoke the work of a choreographer who has a very different approach to archiving than the previous three: Richard Move. Precisely because Move's well-known performances, based on his uncanny and humorous impersonation of Martha Graham, did not originate explicitly as "archival" investigations (as opposed to Tolentino's or Nachbar's or Le Roy's), they become a particularly interesting case of yet another "will to archive" in dance.

In 1996, in a nightclub in Manhattan's meatpacking district called Mother, Richard Move began his now famous performance skits where he transformed himself into Martha Graham. Titled "Martha@Mother," the show initially started as a solo performance, evolving throughout the decade into ever more elaborated forms, including the New York City Town Hall event in 2000 where Move presented alongside his rendition of Graham's seminal *Lamentation* a reenactment of Graham's forgotten 1963 creation *Phaedra*. The event also included a now famous dialogue between Move's Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham himself, in what was perhaps the last time Cunningham performed on a stage before an audience.

In a conversation a few years ago, Move mentioned that what initially attracted him to Graham was the sheer force of her presence and the outrageous theatricality of her "Greek" pieces, which by the early 1990s had become completely outmoded, derided, and neglected by contemporary dance. As he told me then, "Graham had been dismissed as passée" (conversation with the author, November 2009). But, despite her relegation to a passed past, Graham's dances, her stage and public persona, her force (Move talks of her "eroticism"), her words exerted an irresistible pull over Move. Graham was a call Move could not resist.

It is interesting to see how Move's incorporation/impersonation of Martha Graham was very early on perceived not only as a drag impersonation but also as a kind of haunting. William Harris, writing in a *New York Times* review of Move's performances at Mother, explicitly introduced the question of haunting right at the core of Move's reenactments: "Despite forensic evidence, the modern-dance pioneer Martha Graham did not die in 1991.

She can be found performing, name dropping and introducing guest choreographers the first Wednesday and Thursday of most months at a club in Manhattan's meatpacking district" (Harris 1998: 10). In an inspired rhetorical move, Harris describes Richard Move's performance as "dragging Martha back from the dead" (10).

Haunting, understood as a sociological effect that unleashes historicity, adds an affective component to the current politics of reenacting in dance. Avery Gordon theorized on the performative and political force of what she called "ghostly matter" to propose that "such endings that are not over is what haunting is about" (Gordon 1997: 139). This inconclusiveness in endings, the fact that matters are always unsettled and, moreover, demand objectivity when unleashing their afterlife, is what Move understood, and captured, when he found in Graham a force that was incontrollable, even after her death. Graham's "ghostly matter" is an excorporating cloud traveling across time, across space, across genders, across historical periods, across legal copyright barriers, and bursting through the supposed fixity of the past into a transgressive revelation of its powerful actualizations, via a transformative incorporation in Richard Move's performances.

Move's reenactments may have started as intelligently crafted amusement. But as Roger Caillois once warned, one has to beware when playing ghost, lest one becomes one. The fact was that Graham's and Move's exchanges of ex- and incorporations generated a powerful haunting that transcended the realm of entertainment and entered deeply into a much broader and complicated social field. Move's Graham disturbed temporal economies, affective economies, as well as authorial economies. Having "picked up from the ground" (to use the expression Nachbar used to talk about his work of reenacting Hoyer's *Affectos Humanos*) ghostly matters excorporated by a name, a force, a corpse, a singularity, and a system of affect named Martha Graham, Move's body incorporated and then started to perform a radical disturbance for those deemed to have exclusive control over the afterlife not only of artworks but of a dead author's will. Harnessing ghostly matters—matters that by definition strive to escape laws of property and propriety—Move started to incorporate an archive that countered authoritative economies of authorship. Not surprisingly, soon after he started his performances at Mother, Move received from the Graham Company lawyers a "Cease and Desist" letter accusing him of copyright infringement and misleading the public. Move's first performances as Martha Graham coincided with the beginning of a long period where a fierce litigation over Graham's repertoire was being unleashed. As Selby Schwartz, in a recent essay on Move's work, noted: "the rights to Martha's voice, and the authority to represent her character, became the focus of intense litigation that lasted for a decade; for a few years, the dancers in her company were legally prohibited from performing the pieces in repertoire" (Schwartz 2010: 65). This is an ironic twist: before an author's corpse, it was the repertoire (which Diana Taylor famously "opposed to the supposed stable objects in the archive" as

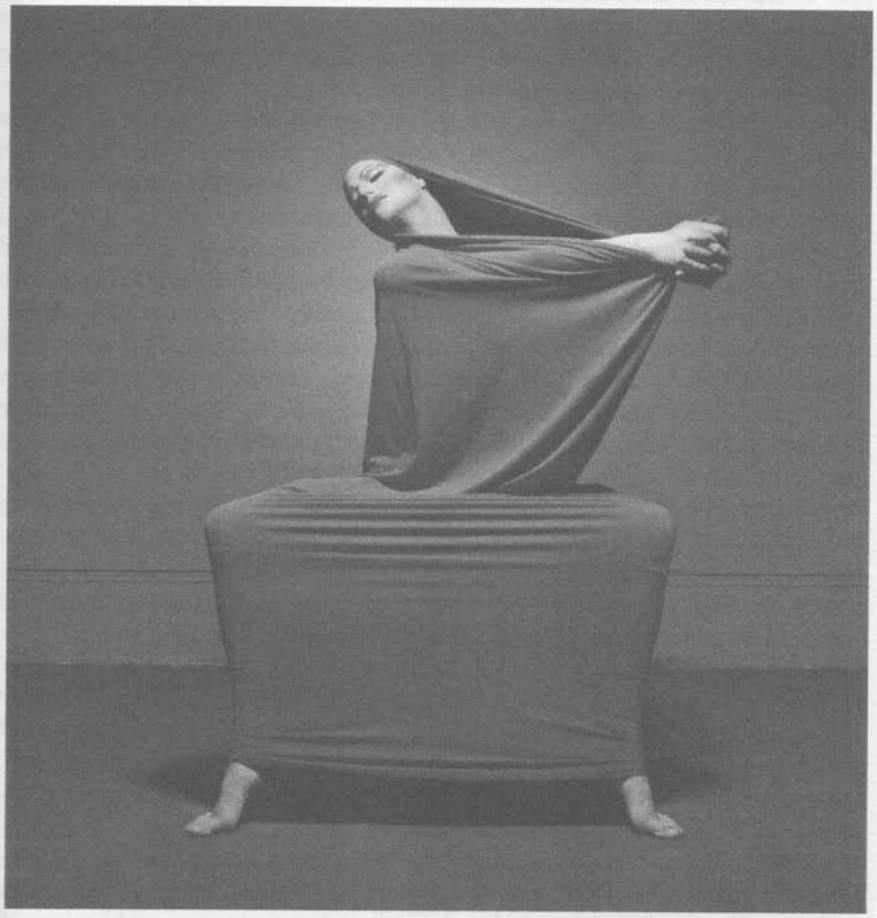

Figure 4.5 Richard Move as Martha Graham. Photo: Josef Astor. Courtesy of the artist.

all that "enacts embodied memory" [Taylor 2003: 20]) that had been frozen, controlled, and disciplined.

A legal blackout lasted four years when the entire Martha Graham repertoire was forbidden from being performed. Between 2000 and 2004 "it was illegal for Graham dancers to perform works in repertoire (Ron Protas held the rights); the situation was so dire that the entire Company had been disbanded. The dancers were laid off, the lawyers kept fighting [...]. For four years, Richard Move was more or less the only person in the world publicly performing Martha Graham's choreography" (Schwartz 2010: 75). Meanwhile, Move's own system of transformation, composed by both dragging and reenacting, was creating, away from the institutional struggles over Graham's corpse, a powerful corporeal and affective archive—an archive

that could unleash Martha's voice, as well as her body, presence, dance, eroticism, creativity, and works. Move responded to the lawyers' demand for him to cease his becoming Martha by changing the photo in the show's poster from Graham's to his and by adding a short disclaimer: "This event is in no way connected to or sponsored by the Martha Graham Entities"—where "entities" covered the school, company, building/studio, ballet licensing, estate, personal effects, etc. In other words, it covered all but ghostly matters, those impalpable virtuals willing actualization.

As Graham was becoming Move, Move was becoming Graham: "I'm filled by her," says Move to Schwartz (Schwartz 2010: 68). Having transformed his body also into Graham's body, and having started to perform reenactments of several of Graham's pieces (Move described his approach to these reenactments as "deconstructions or synoptic re-inventions," the major exception being *Phaedra*, which would be his most faithful rendition of an originating piece), Move did not attract only the attention of policing lawyers. Move's body literally became an attractor of Graham's most intimate collaborators, friends, and former dancers. And, as an attractor—that is, a critical point—he started to be treated by them as an archive. Just as with Tolentino, a body was picked to serve as archive. Just as with Tolentino, it was clear that dance can only find its proper archival site onto/into a body—the body understood as an affective system of formation, transformation, incorporation, and dispersion.

On Move's second show at Mother, Bertram Ross, iconic former dancer with the Martha Graham Company, approached Move and said: "You need to change your lipstick. Martha would use a much darker tone" (Move, personal communication, November 2009). With only black and white photographs of Graham's *Lamentation* (1930) and a 1941 artificially colored film that cannot provide accurate details such as a lipstick's actual hue (the famous purple tube dress appears greenish in this "colorized" film, which was "corrected" in the 1960s but again artificially), there was no way this piece of information could be gathered from the documents (most of the important film documents of Graham's works *Dancer's World*, *Appalachian Spring*, *Night Journey* are all in black and white). So it was gathered via a relational act, a gift, which in giving, transformed at that moment Richard Move's body into an affective archive; or as Schwartz writes, "a repository for an authentic history of Martha" (75). I would just replace "authentic" by "affective" in Schwartz's observation, as more and more "donations" would come from former dancers correcting some detail in Move's gesture, posture, or steps; or giving him personal items that have been strongly linked to Graham. Since his first performances, old videotapes in the ever more decaying and neglected archives of the company would be smuggled out by company members and lent to Move so he could continue his research and compose his short reenactments. Storytelling, smuggling, and giving—all generating an affective historiography to collectively help drag Martha from death and to drag Move into creative returns—not to the past, but to the compossible

and incompossible zones defined by Martha Graham, her works, and her friends. Once into the field of ghostly matters, it is very hard for a kind of community not to come into being—a community without ends.

In April of 2006, on the occasion of the Graham Company's eightieth anniversary, Move performed with the company as Martha Graham as a part of their opening night gala at the Skirball Center, in New York. Move performed both a monologue written for the occasion and danced with Desmond Richardson a duet excerpt from a rather obscure ballet from 1965, *Part Real—Part Dream*. Unlike his previous "deconstructed—distillations," this was an "official" and more conventional revival, coached by the senior company members, under the artistic director, Janet Eilber. Then, in 2007 Move was commissioned to create a new dance for the company. This new work is now in the Martha Graham Company's repertoire and tours internationally. But since Move is also Martha and Martha is now also Move, one wonders about the authorial status of such a piece. As Schwartz observes, "it is a great triumph of drag performance history that Richard Move, with his minimal Graham training and go-go career, with his 6' 4" frame and Jackie 60's tastes, who could say dismissively that Graham's Greek pieces were 'total soap opera,' seemed like the most reliable repository for Martha Graham's career" (2010: 76). But I would suggest that the affective force of the ghostly turned Move into something much more powerful than a "repository": it turned him into a corporeal archive, a system or zone where works do not rest but are formed and transformed, endlessly—like ghostly matters. Or simply, like bodies.

Will to archive/will to reenact/again (and back)

I hope to have shown through the works of these four, very different, choreographers how what I called "will to archive" taps into a work's very concrete and very real virtuality—which remains fully contemporary in its demands for actualization. It is with the identification of a creative (yet virtual) potential already lodged in the artwork itself that I differ from one main aspect in Ramsay Burt's analysis of recent reenactments. In the same essay discussed earlier, Burt describes the political force in reenactments as deriving from artists "conceptually framing their *inevitable failures* to be faithful to an original," where "what is significant is not the *fact of these failures* but how they are framed" (Burt 2003: 38, emphasis added). Contrary to Burt, and with the help of the four modes of reenactments just discussed, I am proposing that failure remains a false problem in relation to the will to reenact (in the strict sense given in this chapter, that is, as an unmetaphorical actualization of an artwork's afterlife). For, to posit "inevitable failures" as (f)acts of unfaithfulness presupposes that an "original" is always felicitous, whole, and faithful to its putative originary (self-)integrity. Rather than think of reenactments as conceptual frames for a choreographer's "inevitable" failed efforts to succeed in copying an original fully, I would like to propose

the will to reenact as a privileged mode to effectuate or actualize a work's immanent field of inventiveness and creativity. This proposition implies that we must treat any artwork, for instance a choreographic piece, as a somewhat autonomous being in its planes of composition, expression, and consistency, while to posit the artwork's autonomy implies recognizing a specific capacity in any choreography to appeal, call, or even demand for actualizations. In this move, I am agreeing with Silvia Benso's "ethics of things," which understands how "works of art, although humanly made, are self-sufficient. Their self-sufficiency erases the presence of the artist in them, in order for the work to be released to its pure self-subsistence" (Benso 2000: 104). Benso's Heideggerian project for an ethics of things can be supplemented by a Deleuzian politics of becoming: one where the "self-subsistance" of any concrete actualization of an artwork is constitutively composed by the reality of the virtual cloud surrounding it—a virtual cloud activating incompossibles and compossibles already in the work but that may not have been actualized yet, may not have found a corporeal manifestation in the work's "original" expression. Actualization is also different than reinvention: it is rather an *invention* whose possibilization nevertheless rests with the work itself. It is the task of the reenactor to pick up a work's virtual (yet very concrete and specific) forces and to actualize that work's always incomplete, yet always consistent, multiple, and heterogeneously singular plane of composition.[14]

It is invention in all its powers that leads me toward the need to replace psychoanalytically charged words such as "impulse" (Hal Foster) or "drive" (Santone) as qualifiers for the artistic desire to archive by the more performative expression "will to archive." I prefer "will" because it names the differential force of augmentation inextricably bound to creation thanks to the specifically choreographic fact of re-turning. I am following here Deleuze's identification of the deep connection between "will" (as positive, nonreactive force) and "creation," one that takes place due to a kinetic articulator: to return. Indeed, for Deleuze, return is the movement that posits a constitutive (creative) difference in repetition, thus "bring[ing] about the equation willing = creating" (Deleuze 2006: 69). Here, we also return to the beginning of this essay and can finally understand why Laurence Louppe's assertion does not hold: return is what dance must do precisely because return is the essential creative differential repetition that frees dance and dancers from Orpheus' curse. This is Mark Franko's insight on dance "reconstructions": they address and foreground a fundamental theatrical-theoretical "obsession" with repeatability that may very well be the onto-political (differential) contemporary mark of dance (Franko 1989: 73).

In a vein similar to my own argument, this differential mark is what moves Franko to propose the term "construction" as an alternative to reconstruction. What must be made clear now is that reenactments, as "will to archive," invest in creative returns precisely in order to find, foreground, and produce (or invent, or "make," as Foucault proposed) difference. This

production of difference is not equivalent to the display of *failures* by reenactors to be faithful to original works—but the actualization of the work's always creative, (self-)differential, and virtual *inventiveness*. Thus the political imperative resulting from the will to archive as will to reenact: difference with repetition, repetition because of difference—both operating under the sign of creation and never of failure, unleashing history and dances toward afterlives where, as Benjamin so beautifully wrote, "the life of the original attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding" (Benjamin 1996: 255).

In this light, recent dance reenactments could be seen not as paranoid-melancholic compulsions to repeat but as singular modes of politicizing time and economies of authorship via the choreographic activation of the dancer's body as an endlessly creative, transformational archive. In reenacting we turn back, and in this return we find in past dances the dark precursor that brings into the world a work's renewed difference.

Notes

1 This and all the following quotes from Didi-Huberman are my translation.
2 Relevant artists working on reenactments include Lilibeth Cuenca, Marina Abramovic, and David Weber-Krebs.
3 Reenactments are significant in such a way that one should ask whether this insistence to return (this will to reenact) might be that particular trait that allows dance to define itself precisely *as* contemporary. For this strong characteristic of some recent experimental dance, which many seem to consider a distinctive trait of its contemporaneity, is in itself already a kind of return (even if unacknowledged) of an earlier wave of reenactments in the early 1980s. The privileged term at the time was "reconstruction," and Mark Franko, writing in 1989, described the "recent reconstructions in the 1980s" as "an impetus to *contemporary experimentation* in choreography" (Franko 1989: 59, note 10, emphasis added). In the same essay, Franko quotes a 1983 review by Sally Banes where she remarks on "the current mania for reconstruction" (57, note 3). More uncannily, Franko opens his essay by mentioning Suzanne Linke's 1988 reconstruction of Dore Hoyer's *Affectos Humanos*—the same piece that Nachbar will (re)turn to in his *Urheben Aufheben* (2008) discussed in this essay.
4 The notion of dance reenactments' capacity to resist can already be found in Mark Franko's essay on reconstructions in experimental dance in the 1980s. Franko proposed the term "reinvention" to characterize how "poised between the apprehension of the object and the creation of the object, [reconstructions] can both serve cultural critique and foster new creativity" (Franko 1989: 73). Curiously, in the late 1970s Allan Kaprow had proposed both the term and the practice of reinvention as an imperative to all re-creations (whether done by himself or others) of his happenings and events, using similar arguments. See, for instance, (Rosenthal 2008).
5 The transition between societies of discipline and current societies of control is theorized by Gilles Deleuze in his essays "Control and Becoming" and "Postscript on Control Societies" (Deleuze 1995). Attributing the diagnosis of this historical transition to Foucault, Deleuze writes: "We're definitely moving toward control societies that are no longer exactly disciplinary. [W]e're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous

control and instant communication" (Deleuze 1995: 174). The relation one can draw between control societies and an investment in reenactments and archiving may be found in Deleuze's observation that "In disciplinary societies you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in control societies you never finish anything"(179). This endlessness would drive all production (including cultural productions) in control societies to be "directed at metaproduction" (181). In this way, we can understand the problematic posed by Burt in relation to reenactments and dance in control societies.

6 Despite the differences between Santone's and Foster's approaches, it should be noted that psychoanalytically speaking, "drive" and "impulse" are one and the same term (Laplanche and Pontalis 1974: 214), which unites both approaches once again back to the psychological (or the meta-psychological) as privileged critical frames of artistic practices.

7 Email correspondence with the author, February 2010.

8 "The virtual is not actual, but *as such possesses a reality*" (Deleuze 1991: 96).

9 On Spinoza's notion of body see (Deleuze 1988b) and (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: chapter 10).

10 Email correspondence with the author, 2009.

11 All quotes from Nachbar are from a text provided by him to the author containing the English translation of his lines throughout *Urheben Aufheben*.

12 "We can speak of events only as singularities deployed in a problematic field, in the vicinity of which the solutions are organized" (Deleuze 1990: 56).

13 The solo works comprised in *Retrospective* are: *Narcisse Flip* (1994), *Self Unfinished* (1998), *Product of Circumstances* (1999), *Giszelle* (2001), *Untitled* (2005), *The Rite of Spring* (2007), *Product of Other Circumstances* (2009).

14 Which means that a plane of composition is a "unit," which is not a "one."

5 Choreographic angelology

The dancer as worker of history (or, remembering is a hard thing)

This chapter moves between three figures of angels. Two are philosophical-theological. One is choreographic-political. Or maybe all three figures are actually one, blended together in turbulent confusion. The chapter's theoretical energy is drawn precisely from this muddle, from the bumps, collisions, collusions, and tensions established between the three angels' distinct relationships to concepts of agency, kinetics, history, and politics. Through such tensile arrangements, a dialectical image emerges—to invoke Walter Benjamin's concept—one where the relationships between transmissibility and servitude, between movement and historical experience, between agency and history find their political expression, as well as their political unconscious, in the figure of the angel.

A dialectical image is a critical constellation, a theoretical-aesthetic montage linking apparently unrelated or unfamiliar elements that, once set into relation to one another, express a given historical and political situation through "an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash" (Benjamin 2003: 473), and that precipitate a "profane illumination" (Benjamin 1978: 179). A dialectical image is therefore highly performative: it triggers a sudden awareness of hitherto unacknowledged social forces that determine present conditions and that invisibly propel the habitual motions of daily life.[1] Accordingly, even though two of the angel figures I invoke here are found in Benjamin's writings, they are very different in nature from one another.[2] The third angel, whose first name is also Walter (last name, Carter), comes from a completely different historical, racial, cultural, political, and aesthetic context. And yet, Carter has also been described, in Benjaminian terms, as an "angel of history"—most notably, by the African-American choreographer and visual artist Ralph Lemon, who was his close collaborator and friend for nearly a decade, from 2002 through 2010.

Through the dialectical image formed by these quite different angels, I want to advance an argument about angelology, understood as a particular *affective-kinetic technology of labor* that enables the transmission and circulation of someone else's messages. If angels are always available, nimble, and perfectly neutral virtuous-virtuosic beings-for-delivery,[3] then angelology names *an ideal of aesthetic-semiotic servitude* that is predicated

on the neutrality, or in Marxist terms, alienation, of workers in relationship to the object of their labor. I will further argue that such an ideal has shaped the perception of the figure and the labor of the dancer in the Western choreographic imagination from the origins of modernity up to the present. Angelology names a key dynamic of labor and power that has informed, and continues to inform, choreography's complicated relationship to (its) history and to the (political and authorial) agency of the dancer. Here I am activating, within the context of choreography, Giorgio Agamben's recent insight that "angelology *directly coincides with a theory of power* [...] the angel is the figure of the government of the world par excellence" (Agamben, Chiesa, and Mandarini 2011: 165, emphasis added). Transposed to choreography, the angel is the model for the government of dancers' bodies; it is through this figure, and through the understanding of the function of this figure as servant, that choreography sets the dancer's relationship to motion and rest and thus determines his or her capacity to side with agency or servitude.[4] This chapter follows the *double nature of the figure of the angel* in order to develop a political archeology of its unfolding as an emblem of the *double nature of the figure of the dancer*.

Given that the dialectical image I am proposing is composed of so many disparate historical, theoretical, aesthetic, political, and racial components, I would like to begin by offering an overview of the way this chapter is organized. First, I will introduce two distinct discussions of angels offered by Walter Benjamin, one from 1921, the other from 1940. I will call them, respectively, the "servile angel," to denote the absolutely neutral and ahistorical messenger of events, and the "angel of history," to denote the critical-agential subject of history as co-worker of events that Benjamin develops in his final essay. The two notions are to be understood as limit concepts whose artificiality describes idealized figures. Yet ideal figures also have interpellative force. Hence, the two figures of the angel discussed here become *teloi*, or "vectors," or "assemblages of subjectivation" (Guattari 1995: 98, 129) for understanding actual performing and dancing bodies, each designating specific and distinct subject-positions.

Considering that these subject-positions simultaneously serve and express different ideologies and concepts of movement that are historically constructed according to shifting conceptions of physics, I next offer a critical reading of classical physics that is indebted to Michel Serres' critique of the history of scientific thought elaborated in the first two parts of his multivolume opus *Hermès* (1969–72). The development of classical physics, the epistemology sustaining the articulation of universal laws governing the motion of bodies between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost precisely overlaps with the historical emergence of choreography as an artistic discipline that is also concerned with the laws governing the motion of bodies. The project of determining, regulating, and governing the laws of motion of all sorts of bodies has had significant political, and biopolitical, implications and effects—including effects on the conception of what constitutes

physical labor, and on what "natural laws" govern the labor of those whose work embodies most directly the physicality of physics: dancers. As Georges Caffentzis writes: "physics ... provides definite analyses of work and new plans for its organization. Its models may appear abstract, but they are directly related to the labor process" (Caffentzis 1992: 220).[5]

In this chapter, I will argue that modern Western choreography created its ideal subjects, its servants of movement, on the basis of classical physics' formulation of universal and therefore "ahistorical" laws (Serres 1972: 74, 87–88) governing the smoothly coherent motion of bodies-as-fluids—thus precluding what Catherine Malabou has called the "ontology of the accident" (Malabou 2009). My point is that a kineticism predicated on ahistorical flows animating ahistorical bodies has shaped Western choreography's understanding of movement, and has therefore formed a particular choreographic conception and perception of the dancer's body and the dancer's agency as being subservient to transcendental laws of (fluid) motion.

Following this discussion, I will next turn to a consideration of another kind of physics by following Michelle M. Wright's recent writing on "the physics of blackness" (2015), and most notably her claim that the ideological ground of the universal laws of motion developed within classical physics expressed and (re)produced a generalized colonialist kineticism that has been essential to the persistent bind between capitalism and racism (Wright 2015: 14–16, 109–140).[6] With this other account of physics we can begin to consider alternative types of choreography, different kinds of angelology, unsuspected forms of articulation between (the laws of) movement and agency, of negotiating political and physical forces. Ralph Lemon has called this kind of agential dancer, tellingly, an "angel of history." Writing in dialogue with Lemon's recent choreographic and video works, Fred Moten sees in this angel the performance of a "blackness of physics" (Moten 2013: 8). I will therefore conclude the chapter with an analysis of the black choreographic angelology of Ralph Lemon and Walter Carter's decade-long collaborations. I will propose that their collaborative work forms a choreo-political angelology, one where an ethics and a politics of *the dancer as agent and worker of history* can be reimagined, refigured, and enacted by way of the physics of blackness. One last remark before starting. If this chapter were to have an epigraph, it would be the following: "survival disorientates history" (Didi-Huberman 2002: 85, translation mine).

The two angels: a) ephemeral angel

In an announcement heralding the release of the first issue of his newly founded literary magazine *Angelus Novus* in 1921, Walter Benjamin offers the following account:

> A Talmudic legend has it that angels are created—a new one every instant and in uncountable cohorts—just to cease their hymn right after

> they have chanted it before God, and then dissolve into the void. May the name of this magazine, *Angelus Novus*, signify that it achieves such actuality, which is the only true one.
>
> (Benjamin in Scholem 1995: 107, translation mine)

In this passage, Benjamin metaphorically affirms his desire to establish a vivid link, a critical correspondence, between the actuality of his new magazine's contents and the actuality of the events in the world upon which it would report and comment. But how remarkable that the notion of actuality and Benjamin's desire for establishing a direct connection between the world of events and the event of their critical and philosophical assessment would be established by way of a theological parable featuring the endless destruction of dedicated performers. Commenting on the particular servile, doxological angelology found in this legend, the Talmudic interpreter Todros Abulafia writes in his 1879 *Otzar Hakabad* that performance here entails the continuous production and destruction of performing bodies that are ceaselessly "disappearing like sparks on coal."[7] What does it mean to affirm time's effects upon singular events not by emphasizing the temporal vanishing of performance, but by celebrating the endless, willful, and total annihilation of its performers, "dissolving into the void" after their sole performance? In the violent dialectic between a performance's temporal passing and a performer's violent demise, in the endless chain of replacement of one performer by another, we see the production of cohorts upon cohorts of those most perfect messengers, those most perfect executioners: angels. But if they are indeed *perfect* messengers, as the word "angel" etymologically implies, if their dedication to the unadulterated delivery of content is predicated on a mix of total servitude and self-erasure in which the angel "fade[s] ... out behind the message" and "must not present himself, or dazzle, or please ... or even appear" (Serres 1995: 102), why then the need for their ongoing destruction before God? What is the danger lurking behind even the most perfect delivery of a hymn (or performance) that prompts the need for the immediate execution of their (perfect) executioners? The danger is the one brought by repetition—or rather, by the *experience* of repetition. By returning once more to what has just been offered to the world, to the same song, to the same performance, even the most perfect messenger, the most neutral and servile being, the most self-effacing dancer, might be tempted to succumb to the *critical* effect that all repetition brings: reflective awareness. Even the most dedicated angel may fall prey to repetition's *affective* effects: attachment or rejection, joy or frustration. In either case, critical or affective effects brought about through repetition always entail the risk of falling for, or falling with, the performance's singularity. As Michel Serres writes, "if the messenger gets pleasure, the transmission becomes obstructed" (1995: 102). But isn't this obstruction, this interference, this cutting or clogging, this crisis of affect, at the very core of criticality as such? By obstructing imposed flows, this

cracking, obstructing hardness precipitates the advent of something else, a critical movement.

The infinitesimal possibility that any of these critical or affective effects might actually occur is enough to generate the potential for deviation and change in the angel's second performance. Indeed, within any once-again, there lurks the danger that something will deviate slightly from the perfect coherence between expression and intention, a something that will start to slacken the complete (indeed, angelical) alignment between performance and performer.[8] Since this dangerous something that operates through the operation of repetition is directly linked to the angel-performer's lingering in time, to *survival*, we might call this particular combination of critical awareness and critical affective work *experience*, *lived experience*, or *historical consciousness*. All of which even the most dedicated angels must necessarily go through, endure (if only briefly, if only to disavow them), once given the chance (and time) to re-actualize once more what their performances have just made happen, have just occasioned, effected, brought into the world. And since even the briefest consideration of an experience, intentional or not, is already an eventful deviation from the servile execution of authorial (God's, the choreographer's) imperatives, it follows that critical reflection prompted by repetition is already a devious performance, if not a devilish one. This experience of deviation occasioned by affective criticality is also a kind of *hardening*: an obstructing movement necessitated by devious repetition that transforms the ahistorical fluid medium of propagation into a solid *thing*. The consequences of this physics of hardened things (which later we will see corresponds to the physics of blackness, and to the thingly interference that introduces blackness in physics), as opposed to a physics of flowing fluids, are not exclusively confined to scientific reasoning. Their impact is also historical-political. As Serres reminds us, "that the solid has a history, this is the first lesson, decisive, because once an object of nature is historical, it escapes exact sciences" (Serres 1972: 79, translation mine, emphasis added). The hardening, deviant fugitivity of the thing's capacity for historical experience is already its critical move. As discussed in Chapter 2, Fred Moten perhaps would even call it a black move: pregnant with political force, begetting a different kind of angelology.

We can now begin to understand why absolute divine violence must govern the doxological performance of angelical servility, and how this performance must be predicated on endless, ahistorical executions. A performance perfectly adhering to its perfection requires that its performer must remain absolutely immune to the possibility of being marked by time, by history, and most importantly by any desire to incorporate the mark of time, experience's scars, into the performance itself, once the moment comes to perform it again. Thus the necessary creation of an altogether new being with each new iteration of the hymn. A particular class of workers must remain impervious to their own work's effects—on the world,

on themselves. They must remain alienated from their labor's effects, particularly from their labor's critical-affective effects—lest the performance gets soiled by a performer's experiencing of the marks of time—and the ensuing temptation to revise, rewrite, reorient, perhaps improve or disapprove (even in the subtlest of ways) the performance after having already gone through it (at least) once before. Within the governing logic of servile angelology, a perfect performance requires absolute authorial violence. This violence does not necessarily deny to the performers the passing of time, but it certainly denies them *their passing through time*. No performer can survive her performance. But, as Georges Didi-Huberman reminds us, once there is no survival, there is necessarily no disorientation of history. And once there is no disorientation of history, there is no dissensual experience of time, and therefore, no capacity for agency over the movements of history.

In the temporal economy that governs angelic servility, ephemerality does not refer to events that pass in time. Nor does it refer to the vanishing of a present performance into the past. Neither is ephemerality about the declension of a work from actuality into memory. In the angelology of servility, ephemerality's aftermath is not even a memory of what has just happened. It is, rather, ahistorical: an endless piling up of purposefully extinguished bodies, black cold cinders fully consumed by their single act. Servile angelogical ephemerality is the willful slaughter of the performer's only life. It turns every event not into a singularity (which is always the event becoming foreign to itself, deviating from previously prescribed variations, an odd and wild bifurcation or swerve of a path[9]), but into an eternal, originary *unit*. The violent authorial affirmation of the one ensures the creation of the ahistorical succession of *one*, *one*, *one*, *one* ... so that the performance, in coming into the world again, may do so *always for the first time*.

This is why God cannot take chances with the always pressing, always unforeseeable, always chaotic, and therefore always hard forces of history—and their always unsettled marks and unpredictable effects. This means that an *experienced performer*, a dancer or singer or actor who works in the grooves of historical consciousness and with the critical-affective dynamics of historical forgettings and rememberings, in other words, that works not as servile angel but as angel of history, *is the greatest threat*.

The two angels: b) angel of history

An encounter:

> [...] in 2002, while in Mississippi researching some inverted migration of time and places(s), I met Mr. Walter Carter. Purportedly the oldest man in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Fifty years or so shy of being a full-time slave. But he was an ex-sharecropper, carpenter, gardener ... his longest job was planting cedar trees.

> We began a creative discussion about our whereabouts, our bodies, our belief systems, and mortality, through the most ineffable of languages, his and mine.
>
> (Lemon 2006, n.p.)

This is how Ralph Lemon describes his first encounter with the then-nearly centenarian Walter Carter (1907–2010), an event occasioned by what Lemon calls "some inverted migration of time and places(s)." Lemon met Carter, Walter met Ralph, in a kind of timespace deviation, thus affirming that experiences of the encounter are always deviant: skewing not only times and places but performing bodies as well—whether angels, historians, choreographers, or dancers.[10] This potential for deviation sets performance adrift. And once performance is set adrift, the question for the performer becomes one of how to set sail, how to follow the more or less turbulent winds of performance's histories, stories, futures.

This question requires a very specific kind of angelology, and with it, an altogether different relation to authorial intention and to the purpose of performing. This is the second angelology that Walter Benjamin brought into the world, nearly twenty years after the euphoric announcement of his magazine in 1921. In the subsequent two decades, the turbulent motion of history brought newfound techno-racist, necropolitical horrors to millions across the globe, Benjamin among them. As is well known, those motions of history would also condition the circumstances leading to Benjamin's death in 1940, at the age of 48.[11] Benjamin called this agent the "angel of history" (Benjamin 1968b: 257). Sixty-two years later, thousands of miles from Benjamin's Europe, and in an entirely different historical and political context from the one in which Benjamin first invoked it, Ralph Lemon encountered another one of these angels of history, in the deep backcountry of the American South. Lemon narrates this encounter in the opening moments of his group choreography *How can you stay in the house all day and not go anywhere?* (2010). Sitting on a white plastic chair under a large video projection of a scene from *1856 Cessna Road*, one of the films Lemon made in collaboration with Carter (in which we can see Carter, dressed in a silver space suit and wearing a white astronaut helmet, climbing into a homemade spaceship), Lemon reads the following text to his audience:

> This is Walter, my teacher. This is one of my lessons. It begins with my reading to Walter. He likes to hear about God, so today I will read from Walter Benjamin's notes on the *Angelus Novus*: "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him goes skyward. This storm is what we call progress."
>
> (Lemon 2010, unpublished performance text)

Lemon is quoting the famous passage from Benjamin's final essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," written in 1940, a few weeks before his suicide, fleeing the German occupation of France.[12] In this essay, Benjamin summons the Angelus Novus once again. Even though the angel has the same name as the defunct magazine Benjamin edited in the 1920s, in this reiterated invocation, the angel no longer appears—must necessarily not appear—as an optimistic metaphor to evoke the way writing should adhere to actuality in a celebration of the now. The angel has gained a new, more profound, more obdurate nature, that of a fully articulated and powerful *conceptual persona*[13]—one that does not "dissolve into the void," but that, above all, *endures*. Benjamin's angel of history operates both philosophically and politically precisely because it does not perish and it does not divert its gaze from the apocalyptic rubble piling up at its feet, whose other name is "progress": as endless gusts of violence, violations, and brutality force the angel's wings wide open, pushing it toward future times and places yet unmapped.[14]

Angels of history deserve their name because they persist in existing, in surviving, and in so doing they insistently witness, experience, and endure the brutal and violent motions of history. In this later formulation of his political angelology, the problem for Benjamin is no longer to explore how critical writing might perfectly adhere to pressing actuality. It is instead to give a critical account of any present time that configures itself as an emergency, as an ongoing state of exception. The problem is how to account for any given present that is also—and within the project of modernity's techno-racist capitalism, necessarily *always*—"apocalyptic time."[15]

This is a kind of time whose continuous presence Ralph Lemon seems particularly keen to remind us about, in a series of what he calls "counter-memorials": half-planned, half-improvised, no-audience-required, small dances or actions that Lemon performed between 2001 and 2006 at historical sites across the United States where lynchings took place. In describing one of these counter-memorials, Lemon offers the following narrative:

> We take a weekend off to visit Duluth, a beautiful city right on Lake Superior. The infamous lynching site, the one that [Bob] Dylan sang about, is in a derelict part of town, so our "memorials" to Issac McGhie, Elmer Jackson, and Elias Clayton are aptly situated. We ramble around a yellow street-light pole, in all sincerity. I choose Elias Clayton, the last to fall, on an early Sunday morning, drunks and prostitutes as audience. (Lemon 2013: 158)

This is not a return of the repressed; it is the activation of an imperative not to forget. As Lemon says, in a text that he reads to his audience in *How can you stay in the house all day and not go anywhere?*, "I seem to arrive at this cataclysmic place every ten years or so" (Lemon 2010, unpublished performance text).

If the angel of history flies with its back toward the future unfurling behind its wings, it is because the angel's duty is to remind us that the mo(ve)ment of time is multidirectional, just as it is the angel's task to persist in searching history's detritus for any clues that might help in planning (always uncertain, always drifting, always necessarily re-planned) future actions, drift lanes, gestures, and movements. This is the only way forward: looking back, attending to those who have perished from the blows of history. And this might very well be the only kinetic imperative for these angels of history: to move decisively, if not necessarily nimbly or with virtuosity, certainly neither in servility nor neutrally, staying attentive to the past, in order to activate futurities even when not knowing exactly where one will end up, and never ceasing to readjust positions, movements, and actions, despite the brutality of what must always be kept before one's gaze.

> When I first met Walter he showed me some juke joint dances, dances he had danced when he was 18 or so, old dances formed on the spot of his memory at that moment. I think he had not done them since he had done them 80 years before. And, at the moment he was dancing the "one step," the "two step," the "slow drag," he was remembering them and dancing them, on the spot.
>
> (Lemon 2006: n.p.)

Such is the choreopolitical task of this angel, a skilled drifter in the disorientating histories of survival: to become history's agent, as persistent as time. Yet such politically choreographed angelology requires not only a different kind of dancer, but an altogether different understanding of the physics of motion. In particular, it requires a different account of the physics of flow—a form of motion that has been so central to choreographic imaginations and to the formation of the ideal image of the dancer as a servile and neutral, non-turbulent, and unaffected messenger.

Physics' angelology

In the second volume of his critique of Western scientific thought, Michel Serres states that the episteme governing the world-view of classical physics as it developed from the work of Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and W. G. Leibniz (1646–1716) up through the nineteenth century "implies the suppression, the erasure, the scrubbing of history" (Serres 1972: 88–89, translation mine).[16] Perhaps what Serres writes about the advent of physics as a modern science could also be said about the founding and consolidation of that modern technology of embodied physics, choreography. Indeed, choreography is a discipline whose development into the art of regulating the motion of bodies is exactly contemporaneous with the emergence of classical physics.[17] Perhaps classical physics' suppression of history, which according to Serres constitutes the necessary precondition for the formulation of universal laws

governing the motion of bodies, also makes up choreography's ideological substratum, as the latter becomes increasingly focused on the propulsion and display of bodies in and as unimpeded flow, partaking with classical physics in "a certain phenomenology of continuity" (Serres 1972: 67).

But how does classical physics describe and understand motion and bodies? Both are variations of a single principle that secures the physical world's contiguity and therefore its universal intelligibility and epistemic coherence: flow. As Serres asks, "what is it that exists objectively in this universe [...] in this world whose continuity ensures its coherence (*including the coherence of those sciences of life and of man*)?" His answer: "the only possible objects on this world of flows, are the phenomena of propagation and the milieus they traverse. *Herewith a world without solids [...] a world deprived of things*" (Serres 1972: 68–69, translation mine, emphasis added). It is not that bodies are hard things being moved into flow by external forces. In classical physics, bodies, including human bodies, and therefore, including dancers, are essentially, ontologically and physically, flow. Bodies are modes of flow that are also flowing in the generalized fluidity of a universal coherence that, for classical physics, is not only the sole guarantee of the world's intelligibility but the only way to govern the world as intelligibility. This paradoxical understanding of bodies as *fluids without history* can be found in Leibniz's famous definition of bodies: "*Omne corpus est mens momentanea, sev careens recordation [...] non retinet ultra momentum: ergo caret memoria.*" "The body is momentary spirit, it lacks remembering [...] it retains nothing beyond the moment: therefore is without memory" (in Serres 1972: 80, translation mine). This is the major point of the physics of flow to which the advent of choreography—the art of governing moving bodies—is contemporary: bodies in this account are essentially ahistorical fluids, they "lack remembering." Central to my point is that what applies to bodies also applies to subjectivity: as Serres emphasizes, the "purification of the object [bodies in general]" in classical physics, through a "suppression of historical metamorphosis—is isomorphic to the purification of the subject" (Serres 1972: 90, fn. 10, translation mine). The purification of the subject in the ahistorical realm of classical physics' universal laws of motion exactly corresponds to how the category of Man became universalized as reified Subject (white, adult, male, educated, "enlightened," balanced) in Western modernity, by perceiving itself as "always already lived as unadulterated physiology" (Weheliye 2014: 44). This purification of the subject and its body through historical transformation is the outcome of an epistemic formation that also entails angelical governance and angelical servility, thus illustrating Agamben's point "that the real problem, the central mystery of politics is not sovereignty, but government; it is not God, but the angel; it is not the king, but ministry; it is not the law but the police—that is to say, the governmental machine that they form and support" (Agamben, Chiesa, and Mandarini 2011: 276). In the paragovernmental machine that choreography necessarily rehearses whenever it privileges

servile angelology and ahistorical fluidity, the emptied-out subject that emerges reflects a choreographic authorial economy that follows "the paradigmatic relation of angelology and bureaucracy" (Agamben, Chiesa, and Mandarini 2011: 156). Thus the proximity between servile angels—living in the mo(ve)ment, unadulterated by any mo(ve)ment, performing without agency—and a classical vision of the dancer's body. Both are treated, perceived, and self-perceived less as experiential or critical agents of their own mobility, than as neutral vehicles of universally flowing movements.

The relation between servile angelology, the physics of flows, and the intertwining of choreographic and political imaginations about sovereignty and agency is not just metaphorical. Servile angelology's physics of flow is a choreographic project that exemplifies what Andrew Hewitt has called "social choreography": the aesthetic-kinetic expression of certain ideologies that through their aesthetic performance pedagogically reify political imaginations in such a way as to become the unconscious second nature of politics (Hewitt 2005: 1–35).[18]

As an example of social choreography, Hewitt comments on a well-known passage that has been instrumental in understanding the link between the ideal image of a free society and its expression in dance. Hewitt turns to the famous analogy offered by Friedrich Schiller, the German Romantic admirer of the *Aesthetischer Staat* (Aesthetic State). In a letter dated February 23, 1793, Schiller develops an analogy between the functioning of a society made up of freely moving individuals and a specific example of choreography he once witnessed. This analogy can only be described, in terms of physics, as a highly controlled *representation* of "turbulent flow." As Schiller writes:

> I know of no better image for the ideal of a beautiful society than a well-executed English dance, composed of many complicated figures and turns. A spectator located on the balcony observes an infinite variety of criss-crossing motions which keep decisively but arbitrarily changing directions without ever colliding with each other. Everything has been arranged in such a manner that each dancer has already vacated his position by the time the other arrives. Everything fits so skillfully, yet so spontaneously, that everyone seems to be following his own lead, without ever getting in anyone's way. Such a dance is the perfect symbol of one's own individually asserted freedom as well as of one's respect for the freedom of the other.
>
> (Schiller quoted in De Man 1984: 263)

From a balcony, Schiller witnesses a choreographic model for a free society in which the physics of flow perfectly coincides with the kinetics of political exemplarity found in the dance. In physics, "a flow is the continuous movement of a fluid—liquid or gas—from one place to the other" (Santos 2014: 8). Since, as we saw, Schiller's is "a world without solids" (Serres

1972: 69, translation mine), the fluidity of the English dance aligns the body of the dancer with the elemental characteristics of physical fluids.

The ahistorical, but absolutely intra-coherent world of fluids involves only two kinds of movement, defined by classical physics as "laminar flow" and "turbulent flow." The expressive nature of the English dance, with its "many complicated figures and turns," its "arbitrarily changing directions," and its "infinite variety of criss-crossing motions," suggests a correspondence with the definition of turbulent flow. Its counterpart, laminar flow, is defined as being a movement where "the molecules move smoothly, all in the same direction and at constant speed" (Santos 2014: 8). Yet as Serres explains, "a laminar flow is as *ideal* as it is *theoretical*. In daily experience, it is extremely rare that all local flows remain parallel, *they always become more or less turbulent*" (Serres 1977: 12, translation mine, emphasis added). When flows become turbulent, which is to say whenever movements are actual and not ideal or theoretical ones, "the molecules move in many different directions at different speeds" (Santos 2014: 8).

In the ongoing dialectics between these two orders of flow, it is turbulence that is being choreographed in the English dance, and expressed visually in the continuous manifolds of the baroque styles of ornamentation that emerged in this era.[19] But it is the laminar that imposes upon the turbulent a transcendent principle of ideal order, thus preventing turbulent curves from dissipating into entropic chaos. Between ideality and reality, or between ideology and praxis, laminar flow visually and kinetically harmonizes the movement of all moving bodies, expressing the shared ideals of a community of equals smoothly moving together without breaks, resistances, obstacles. While the many complex turns and sudden shifts that make up the turbulent flow and the "arbitrary changes of direction" that Schiller observed in the English dance, would seem to correspond to the potentiality for chaos in daily life. This is the crucial point in the English dance's display of the government of bodies in flow: despite the sudden and apparently arbitrary turmoil in the path and speed of the choreography's many molecules—its dancers-citizens—these are somehow always able to avoid collisions. No unexpected encounters can take place because, as Schiller writes, "everything has been arranged in such a manner that *each dancer has already vacated his position by the time the other arrives*" (*emphasis added*). A logistical, invisible, all-encompassing distribution of assigned positions, along with well-defined and refined dislocations, are choreographically implemented in order to create a moving image that secures, affirms, and ensures that all turbulence—even the dangerous turbulence of a citizenry—can be managed, governed, and harmonized thanks to the ideal-transcendent principle of laminar flow. Schiller's language betrays his assumption that a higher order is indeed in command: "everyone seems to be following his own lead." Let us pause on that "seems." What Schiller describes as each dancer's "spontaneous" movement is actually a highly determined and rehearsed introjection of pre-given temporal and spatial orderings. The English dance represents the

ideal of a physics of flow that has been applied to the (political and social) domestication of bodies: the spectacle is of a choreographed micromanagement. Whatever happens, the choreography is there to prevent collisions or interruptions in the flow, thus foreclosing the possibility of unanticipated encounters, the potentiality of the accident, of the "plasticity that does not repair [...] that cuts the thread of life in two or more segments," the "threatening detour that opens up another pathway, one that is unexpected, unpredictable, *dark*" (Malabou 2009: 8, emphasis added).

This is what Schiller keeps at bay: the dark physics of unpredictable encounters among hard things bumping into each other, marking life, making history. The English dance is the epitome of a political ontology of movement that precludes the possibility of the event of the encounter. Its image of social harmony is predicated on a careful angelologic choreography of avoidance. One is free to move along as long as one does not bump, run into, stumble upon, or crash into another. Society is a collection of tangentially arranged individuals, and the social task of choreography is to carefully manage a circuitry of fluidly hygienic avoidance. In this world without encounter, without crashes and cuts, a world governed by ideal and idealized laminar flows, one can live the unfolding of predetermined forms, but never confront the radical, beautiful violence of a total transformation precipitated by the experience of the encounter, understood as the singularity of an *angelology of history* and its black physics.

The blackness of physics, the physics of blackness

To write about the work that Ralph Lemon has created over the past decade and a half is to enter into a physics and an ethics and a choreopolitics that are each responsive to the productive and always unpredictable impact of an encounter. In his philosophy of the encounter, Louis Althusser proposed that the building of worlds is predicated upon not only the necessity of unforeseeable, accidental encounters, but also on a specific kind of construction work to make encounters last (Althusser 2006). Making the encounter last is the task of those who refuse to abide by a choreographed society where individuals move about incessantly only to avoid each other and to make of this avoidance the glorious performance of their virtuosity.

Because it is predicated on unpredictable and lasting encounters, Lemon's choreography requires a different kind of physics. One propelled by a desire not to avoid the world of others—as if collision was the precondition for an entire, long, consistent precondition for a fundamental encounter to come. Althusser defined encounters as "ruptural units" (2006: 41), by which he meant the way historical events are experienced as singularities in life. In the case of Lemon and Carter, the rupture that became a decade-long bond took place perhaps in May of 2002, or perhaps in November of that year. Lemon himself seems to be unsure.[20] And this chronological uncertainty makes sense since an encounter is not a date. But what was the precursor of this

particular encounter? For Lemon, it was to set himself adrift. This was the first step of putting into action his desire to rearticulate the entire physics of his choreographic work, his entire way of moving. In the late 1990s, Lemon decided to confront some not-so-veiled accusations that he was not really "a 'black dance artist' " (Lemon 2000: 35). In the face of this interpellation, Lemon undertook a simple act, one which has not ceased since 1997: he set sail. He shifted his choreography, his life, and his art in order to begin a search for the most precious thing that movement has to offer: the singularity or event of the encounter, in its most matter-of-fact manifestation. In setting sail, Lemon developed "a materialism of the encounter, in other words, of the aleatory and of contingency" (Althusser 2006: 167).

The material contingency of encounters as singularities led Lemon to invent a geography of drifting rather than of navigation. If drifting is not as precise as navigation, it nevertheless requires extreme rigor, what Deleuze and Guattari called the necessary "anexact yet rigorous" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 483) procedures of becoming. This rigor Lemon describes as "*my precise daily discipline of being structurally available to this unknown*" (Lemon 2009: 254, emphasis added). Because once we have errantly searched for the encounter, discipline becomes an imperative, albeit one that is not at all a transcendent command or imposition. It is rather an ethical-political imperative in the sense evoked by Fred Moten and Stephano Harney: "An imperative is implied here: to pay attention to (black) performances since it is left to those who pay such attention to re-theorize essence, representation, abstraction, performance, being" (Harney and Moten 2013: 49). Re-theorizing the essence of the ways in which choreography represents itself, in the ways it abstractedly conceives of its relations to movement and to the laborers of its movements, its performance, its blackness: this is what Lemon set out to do, paying close attention to what choreography had left out of its imperial domains. This took place with particular force and power within Lemon's collaborations with Walter Carter, as recorded in films, photographs, Lemon's own narratives and drawings—all works that Lemon calls, appropriately, "events":

> So Walter, I have these things I'd like you to do, for a video play I'm directing. Simple tasks, things we all do everyday that seem ordinary but that are in fact sacred, but we don't know that they are sacred but maybe some of us do … as important to our lives as prayer, whatever we pray to, and we all pray but maybe don't recognize we're praying, until we find something, and have to think about what it is we found. […]
>
> Anyway, it's about you and me. I'll do them first, the tasks and then you'll do them, however you remember them. I'll do them my way and you'll do them your way. And you can make as much noise as you want. And then we'll rethink what it was we just did and call them "events," because "events" sounds more determined than "tasks."
>
> (Lemon 2009: 261–262)

For Lemon, the encounter with the event must be investigated, until we find something, and have to think about what it is we have found. At a certain moment in the nomadic pursuit that informed Lemon's trilogy of pieces *Geography*, *Tree*, and *Come Home Charley Patton*, and which took him at various points to Haiti, Australia, Japan, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana, he journeyed to the deep South of the United States. And there, he encountered the encounter.

Of the many encounters Lemon experienced in his several trips to the American South (and which are narrated in poignant detail in his 2013 autobiographical book *Come Home Charley Patton*), none was as rich in unpredictable unfoldings as with Walter Carter. Through their encounter, both men shifted the habitual separations between choreography and visual art, dance and friendship, making and doing. Together, but not always in agreement, not always knowing exactly what this togetherness meant, or understanding what each really wanted from the other, they cracked choreography open, producing a new form of choreographic singularity out of sheer will and perseverance and a commitment to make the encounter last longer than its particular time would have otherwise allowed.

We know now why the element that charges physics with blackness is not just a universal law governing ahistorical bodies in laminar flow. This blackness of physics would be a deviation from the alignment of classical physics with a certain project of political subjugation. In this account, the blackness of physics is the wild deviation from the propriety of proper paths, its rough treatment of social choreographies of polite-policed avoidance (as in Schiller's description of the English dance), a will to encounter in the world that which proclaims the ethical imperative of reimagining what it is to actually encounter the absolutely unforeseen—and make with it an alliance for living. In this kind of charged errancy, where home is to be found on the move, we can only have the certainty of hard terrains, random violence, provisional joys, and the pressing need to constantly find sources for yet another dose of courage.

In any event, Lemon's black physics does have one universal law, its universal principle or transcendental field. Lemon formulates it in the opening monologue of *How can you stay in the house all day and not go anywhere?*, a piece that premiered after Walter Carter's death in 2010. In this monologue, Lemon reads the following statement: "Making it earthbound. Maybe becoming universal, part of our inherited 'universal doubt,' which is one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard, universal doubt … what we all share" (2010, performance text). Here, doubt becomes a universal principle of the black physics of Lemon's historical angelology. Lemon rephrases this doubt in other terms: "I don't know; 'I still don't know,' quoting Walter" (Lemon 2009: 276). But for Lemon, not knowing is not an excuse for not doing. It is certainly not an excuse for not doing once and again, repeating time and again, what only apparently is the same task, thus revealing that, indeed, "time does not just flow: *it works*" (Didi-Huberman 2002: 320, translation mine).

Not knowing does not mean not being ready for the event; it does not mean not to work hard to summon it. Reminiscing on his travels through the American South, Lemon writes that his journeys all required careful planning and specific forms of preparation. The way Lemon defines planning involves a completely different understanding of choreography's relation to the sovereignty over movement and over dancers; it involves an understanding that adds another dimension to black physics, beyond the principle of universal doubt. This planning entails what Dorothea Olkowski terms "a creative science of the singular"[21] (1999: 176), or what Lemon himself describes as "a *particular* knowing":

> Well, there is what I plan, prepare; a particular knowing and there is what I know cannot, will not happen. The in between tension is the reality of both knowing and not knowing. My prepared plan provides a semblance of courage. The illusion of courage is necessary in giving shape/form to the amorphous and imprecise nature of what will actually happen: a daily event appropriate to uncontrolled circumstances and my precise daily discipline of being structurally available to this unknown.
>
> (Lemon 2009: 254)

Writing on the differences between "policy and planning," Harney and Moten define the former as "the new form command takes as command takes hold" of life and subjectivity under contemporary regimes of neoliberal, neocolonialist, racial capitalism. In this sense, policy is the contemporary form of the policed choreography of existence, a choreography requiring conforming and servile cohorts upon cohorts of "delivery people," indefatigable angels, busybodying conformity so that command can take hold as the only form in which one can imagine life as something under one's command. In contrast to the choreopoliced living of policy, Harney and Moten offer an account of what they call "planning":

> the plan is to invent the means in a common experiment launched from any kitchen, any back porch, any basement, any hall, any park bench, any improvised party, every night. This ongoing experiment with the informal, carried out by and on the means of social reproduction, as the to come of the forms of life, is what we mean by planning; planning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futurial presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible.
>
> (Harney and Moten 2013: 74–75)

Moten and Harney's definition of planning is not only deeply evocative of Lemon's words describing his own choreographic angelology of history, it also powerfully describes the specific, quotidian sites and spaces where Lemon creates his works. In this account of planning, we can glimpse the

three principles of Lemon's choreographic angelology: universal doubt, the structured orientation and openness toward the encounter, and planning as subversion of authorial policing. Conjoined to and actualized within specific dances or actions, the three principles activate a series of experiments with "futurial presences." Lemon's choreographic materialism of the encounter—always unforeseen, always apersonal, always haphazard—becomes a theory of the encounter, or rather, a principle of diagrammatic planning and of rigorous preparedness for being open to what is yet to come.

One must will the encounter—just as one must master chance.[22] And then, one must be ready and open for whatever comes, so as not to be "unworthy of the event" (Deleuze 1990: 149). To embrace the accidental ontology of the encounter as the motor of choreographic experimentation is already to invoke another physics and another system of law for dance. Both trip upon the world and embrace the hard knocks, stumbling upon what might be there, waiting, pregnant with promises.

No wonder, then, that Carter's first movement upon initially meeting Lemon was to fall "completely flat onto his stomach. He quickly stumbled up to his feet [...]. 'I ain't fallen like that in a long time!' He repeated, twice" (Lemon 2009: 266). Falling and then *stumbling up*: two sides of the same precarious movement, revealing the force of the encounter, its faulty terrains, and the crisis of mobility inherent in all movement that actually moves. This was sometime in 2002, somewhere near Yazoo, Mississippi. Lemon had stumbled upon an angel of history, and so had Carter. Four years later, as he was about to start his first video session with Lemon, it should not be a surprise that Carter "got out of the car and fell again, backwards, sliding against the car door" (Lemon 2009: 267). During this session, Lemon, Walter Carter, and Carter's second wife, Edna Carter, began reenacting for Chelsea Lemon-Fetzer's camera excerpts from Andrei Tarkovski's *Solaris* (1972) and of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). Not by chance, the first step that the cosmonaut Dr. Kris Kelvin takes as he arrives on the space station orbiting the planet Solaris in Tarkovski's film is a stumbling fall, much like the one Carter took upon meeting Lemon: smack on the ground, flat on his stomach. We owe to Frantz Fanon a phenomenology of the potentially restorative force of the stumble, and of a kind of physics that is a necessary precondition for the possibility of escaping interpellation, of escaping from over-determined subject-positions, and of making for oneself another body-schema, capable of answering the historical, political, sexist, and racist forces that constantly rob and alienate certain subjects from their own bodies (Fanon 2008: 89–119).[23] In the reiterative stumble we find a kinetic theory of the accident, and in the accident we find the potentiality for a physics of the encounter, and in the encounter we find the promise of a true event. Only after the event can the reverie of haunting—that mixture of memory and delirium, past and present, fact and fiction that the planet Solaris brings to all who fall within its orbit—begin to take place.

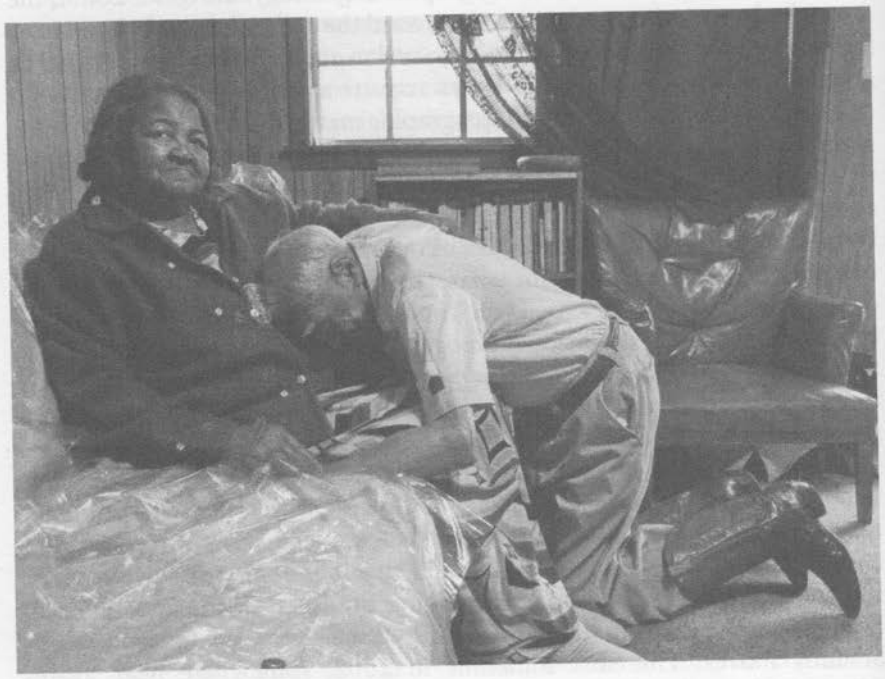

Figure 5.1 Edna Carter and Walter Carter reenacting a scene from *Solaris* for Lemon's *1856 Cessna Road*. Archival pigment color print from original film. 2010. © Ralph Lemon. Courtesy of the artist.

On the issue of Walter's frailty and age, this is what Ralph Lemon shared with me, in a personal email, a few years ago:

> This is a very delicate matter. I know I am using Walter, that this project is in many ways exploiting him. But I also feel that I know what he can do, what his body can do, where to push. And yes, his age and his potential for dying is very much part of the point. His spirited actions are also the point, that he is as alive, if not more alive than he is a 99-year-old dying man. In fact, I don't think he's dying, I think that part's a myth, an illusion.
>
> (Lemon, 2006)

When I asked permission to use this passage, Lemon replied by asking me in turn to add the following, which I reproduce verbatim: "i also think it's important (if you use this) that you mention that once walter died that i was a somewhat surprised. he was in fact dying" (email correspondence, August 25, 2015). Note the indefinite article ("a somewhat surprised"). Note the period, interrupting the sentence. And note how Walter's death is cast by

Lemon as a process, a new movement: not "he was in fact dead," but "he was in fact dying."

Walter's frailty is his strength. We can see and sense this in the opening shots of Lemon's video *1856 Cessna Road*, as Walter climbs down some steps, almost falling on the last step, or climbs up with effort a rusty ladder in an apparently abandoned industrial complex. As curator Thomas Lax writes, Carter's "performative presence is deeply evocative. The ethereality, sometimes idiosyncrasy, of Carter's performances suggest that, as connected as he was to Little Yazoo, he was also somewhere else. An aging man who knew he was living the end of his life, Carter represented what Lemon calls a 'concept of mortality as something infinite'" (2012: 5). Catherine Malabou suggests that old age can be understood as pure potentiality, filled with the promise of new logics of governance, autonomy, wisdom, while also brimming with the energies of the past and charged, physically, due to the frailty of the body, with the affects of a veritable state of exception—a state of emergency, for sure, but also a sovereign state of being that is at the same time utterly singular. As Malabou proposes "listening to [...] older subjects the same way as emergency rescue teams respond to an explosion or attack" (Malabou 2009: 49–50). Walter's frail yet utterly determined dances and actions attain their essential force precisely thanks to the urgency of his old age, in the exceptionality of the way he can bypass linear time by scrambling past, present, and future within the historical ruination of the American South, and the forms of ruination that continue to structure American capitalism.

Adrift, Lemon and Carter take history, memory, time, agency, forces, words, images, friendship, economy, art, and choreography along for a very particular spacetime trip. Disorientating history, "Lemon lands us in a disorienting and mythological interpretation of a zone of emotional and historical intensity" (Lax 2012: 9). In 2008, when Walter Carter was 101 years old, Lemon, two of Walter's sons, and their family friend Lloyd Williams began to literally build a vehicle capable to land on that zone of intensity, to take them all to their mutually conjoined, errant roots. This vehicle took the form of a large, metallic, birdcage-like spacecraft with a television satellite dish perched on top. The spaceship was constructed out of the leftovers of the derelict, techno-industrial dreams of capitalist production. The process of building this rickety circular spaceship is partly documented in *1856 Cessna Road*, which Thomas Lax describes as follows:

> The screen fades to black; when the image returns we find Carter and his family at work. They place an antenna, fasten a dome and wire light fixtures onto a cylindrical, wheeled metal object. Carter enters it, and as he gets behind the wheel, we realize the structure is a vehicle. As the team pushes Carter down a paved road, the homemade vehicle links the men's handiwork to a landscape defined by its relationship to technological production.
>
> (Lax 2012: 8)

On September 12, 2008, I received an email from Ralph Lemon, with the message: "Hi Andre, here are some pics of the mississippi work (flying saucer) in progress. looking forward to tuesday. best, r." I was totally floored. The photograph showed a choreographic working of times, an angelology of history, in the most striking way. One of them became the cover of this book.

Interference, or performance's chronopolitics

Ralph Lemon and Water Carter teach us how a dancer can be an avatar of memory, collapsing past, present, and future moments by stumbling upon and into new formations of temporality. Here, motions are no longer situated within the order of flow, but tend instead toward a kind of constant interference that is so human that it reconstitutes the entire category of the angelical. We might call this interference performance, but only so long as performance is understood as what Kodwo Eshun has called "a chronopolitical act," in reference to the reconsiderations of temporality within Afrofuturism—of which Lemon's project would be a particular expression (Eshun 2003: 292).

In this account, dancers become interfering agents—beings fully embracing the viscosity of memory, the viscosity of futurity, within the precariousness of the present. The dancer as historical agent works at the threshold of another kind of choreographic formation, in which precariousness and ephemerality are experienced and lived less as a kind of sorrow about the passing of time, and more fully in terms of the condition of physical matter itself. This in turn demands two specific affective responses: persistence, and a will to return. As Brazilian performer and performance theorist Eleonora Fabião puts it, "If 'ephemerality' denotes disappearance and absence (thus, predicating that at a certain moment, something was fully given to view), 'precariousness' denotes the incompleteness of every apparition as its corporeal, moving, constitutive condition" (Fabião 2012: 134). In the precariousness of choreographic angelology, under the name of a black physics, dancers appear not as delivery people, delegated performers, or perfect messengers flowing and floating above the fray of human affairs. Rather, they appear as beings subjected to, but also agents of, the effects of an incomplete apparition before history.

But why call them angels, with all the fluffy poetics and theological resonances of this term? Why not simply call these agents of history human? Because their political force derives precisely from their hesitation to fully partake of the category of the human. This hesitation, I suspect, was also present in Benjamin's own fascination with the parahuman figure of the angel. Angels of history remind us that, even as we are inescapably bound by the powerful winds of history and the storms of "progress," the choreopolitical task is to find occasions for deviation within the apparently overwhelming propulsion of history, including and perhaps most urgently, deviations from that route called humanity, or, as Sylvia Wynter reminds us, that genre

called Man (McKittrick 2015: 9–12). The angel of history may not be capable of closing his wings against the winds of progress, but perhaps he can adjust them, even slightly, so that his backward motion may lead us toward another place, another life, another corporeality, another enfleshment. Perhaps. Regardless, the angel's body is the fibrillating membrane of historical experience, and as such the angel's body articulates past, present, and future. The angel of history dances the impossible sutures and constitutive ruptures of historical time.

Michel Serres emphatically reminds us, "a fluid does not retain a single vestige, a single mark, a single impression [...]. Thus, a fluid does not have a history, because it does not have memory" (Serres 1972: 78). On the contrary, only bodies hard enough can enjoy the capacity of retaining memory and being marked by history: "Solids deform, but little: and if they do not deform much, it is because they preserve the previous deformation at the moment they receive the next deformation, transformable without effacing; site of vestiges and traces, all solid is monument, this is to say, witness, memory, information stock" (Serres 1972: 79).

Ralph Lemon writes, "Walter mumbles to himself, 'The human condition is quite juvenile. To be held—by its parent, a lover, or itself. We keep coming back for more' " (Lemon 2006: n.p.). Walter's use of the "it" to describe the human is evocative: it renders the human as a form of matter, and thus, reveals human relationality as essentially a "hard thing"—the first principle for the blackness of physics that animates this historical angelology of dance. No ideal laminar flow here, for the sake of representing a smooth sociability made out of pre-choreographed avoidances. The assemblage of elements into a constellation of singularities, dialectical image or improbable encounter, necessitates just enough solidity to en-join, to become joyful, i.e., with the capacity to augment the powers of the elements in situation, lest everything flows away, as in some ideal movement in classical physics, ideal universe where "what exists is what propagates [as fluid], moreover what propagates in a ahistorical world" (Serres 1972: 88). Affectively, corporeally, physically, emotionally, aesthetically, choreographically, one must always be compact enough to enjoy the encounter. Moreover, it is only thanks to this "paradigm of solids" that a historically inflected physics can "rejoin the thing itself" (Serres 1972: 88).

And this is how the pathway to an interfering agency is forged: thanks to the disorientating power of survival that puts time to work in rejoining the thing. Which means that choreographic angelology involves a diagrammatic definition of agency, one that does not align agency with unbridled omnipotence, but rather understands "the fulcrum of agency" to denote "choice as the moment of interpellation that is not 'free' of, but in fact intensely informed by, whatever in the physical and mental environment one notices in that moment" (Wright 2015: 117). Assembling those whatevers into desirable singularities or events with which to summon the necessary act: this is an activation of agency that departs from the linear physics of

inertia, and one that finally also allows for a choreopolitical definition of blackness, since blackness

> cannot be defined as primarily empirical nor understood as the nonproperty of particular subjects, but it should be understood as an integral structuring assemblage of the modern human. Once we take this into account, we can practice a politics, which, rather than succumbing to the brutal facticity of blackness, *introduces invention into existence*, as Fanon argues.
>
> (Weheliye 2014: 32)

A choreographic angelology of blackness would be this capacity for the singular introduction of a stubborn fugitive invention precipitated and precipitating the event of the always unforeseeable, but always present, promise of encountering the encounter.

The single-channel video piece *(the efflorescence of) Walter* (2008) depicts Walter Carter performing a series of different actions: digging a hole in the ground, smashing a porcelain white rabbit with a red brick, placing an empty plastic cup beneath the rain to fill it with water, spreading a white paste (Crisco cooking shortening) over a blue porcelain jar. As he digs the large hole in the ground, an archeologist of the remains of black matter, his spade picks up three black vinyl LPs buried in the earth. All three are intact. Carter grabs them, walks toward two rickety wooden shacks nearby, and throws the records about on the ground, as if using them to sow the land. Once this is done, he stands and stoops over—his task remains unfinished, yet it has been for now accomplished. Towards the end of the video, Walter appears inside a room with a large window, standing near a workbench. He lights a single light bulb, and places shards of the now broken vinyl LPs on top of the workbench. With silver duct tape, he patiently begins to put the shards back together, not always able to fit them perfectly but persisting in trying to mend what had been smashed. Broken records kind of mended, kindly kind of mended by centenarian black hands of a centenarian black performer who his choreographer calls an angel of history, and who knows how to both remember the distant past and how to forget the barely present. Restoring the records into broken wholes, perhaps to be set spinning around their centripetal-centrifugal black hole without whose motion nothing spins out, just as nothing can be preserved, nothing may be set into motion just as no recording can resurface as precarious re-presentification of a persistent slice of the past. Black physics seeped into broken records. The question that is activated by the mending hands and reactivated in the dances of Lemon's teacher, Lemon's dancer, Walter Carter, is *how to get time to work for dance?*

> There's one other thing that I know, that really matters, that Walter knows really matters, that if his body invokes one thing, only one thing, it is *the crescendo of dying*. He's that wildly alive.
>
> (Lemon 2009: 276)

Every hymn a new angel; every hymn a new body. But this has nothing to do with life as we know it. In the end all we have is this one body, persevering in insisting to return every day, for more of the work that needs be done, making time work, not flow. Yet one does not come back every day as a brand new body, as the Talmudic legend of the angels who are destroyed after their sole performance would have it. One must keep something of the past just as one must forget something of the past in order to perform this crucial return, this stubborn hanging on, despite, or perhaps thanks to, the crescendo of dying. Wildly forgetting is what makes it all return, as long as it is synthesized through the viscosity of labor. "I ask Walter [Carter] what he thinks about the work we are doing all the time. And he says that he doesn't care, literally 'I don't care what this is.' If I ask him the next day what he did the day before he won't remember, but he will always say: 'It's fun.' "[24]

A black angel of history scrambles the arrow of ephemerality that is always conceived as heading towards a horizon of disappearance and death. Disorientating history turns angelic messengers into archival agents—in the sense that Michel Foucault describes the archive as being neither "a storehouse" nor "the library of all libraries" but rather "the system of formation and transformation of statements" which "establishes that *we are* difference" (Foucault 1972: 130, 132, emphasis added).[25] This is also why only this poor dance, half broken, never fluid, incoherent, sped up by the crescendo of dying, fully aware of the *materiality* of ephemerality that Fabião calls "precariousness," is so powerful politically: "It is the unfinished accomplishment of a victory that finished accomplishment takes away" (Moten 2008: 204). The unfinished accomplishment is precisely what drives Ralph Lemon's choreographic project, as he tells his audience in *How can you stay in the house all day and not go anywhere?*:

> And in this zone, gap, void, where they diligently want to follow the rules but can't—that is where I want this work to live and flourish.
>
> (Ralph Lemon, performance text, 201)

In the zone, the Southern zone, the black zone, a zone between law and its suspension, a black angel walks about, dressed in a silver spacesuit. Walter in the historical world of solids. In Lemon's film *1856 Cessna Road* we see him roaming about, lost space-time traveler, sometimes with a shotgun in his hand. Around him, all is rust and dirt, depopulated. And yet everything in his surroundings seems to be functioning, since the history of the assemblage between capitalism, colonialism, and racism needs to ceaselessly reproduce its history of exploitation as one that functions, smoothly. The scarred ground of the derelict American South is the landscape where Carter as time traveler and memory avatar walks about, breaking the rules that are supposed to regulate his pace, manner, and existence. His hesitations, his quasi-stumbles, and his persistence map and reveal the many ruptures,

fissures, cracks (on the land, on bodies) produced by history in what should be—in the ideal fantasy of logistical kinetics as exemplified in the Schillerian account of the English dances and in the dreams of classical physics—a smooth surface that allows for unimpeded flow. Walter bumps against bumps, hurling his solid force as frail as it might be. This is angelogical choreography as black physics: escaping the epistemic exactitude of classical physics and modern science, performing a fugitive opening towards another, solid mode of movement, releasing choreography and its subjects from the unquestioned reliance on flow.

> So maybe before there are questions, any questions, there is only discursive thinking. Life, unpackaged, unpresentable. Voiceless. And by obscuring I'm allowed to have a voice.
>
> (Lemon 2013: 207)

Figure 5.2 Walter Carter in *1856 Cessna Road*. Archival pigment color print from original film. 2010. © Ralph Lemon. Courtesy of the artist.

Notes

1 As Susan Buck-Morss explains, "The dialectical image [...] is a way of seeing that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes of their alignment." (1995: 210). Benjamin himself writes, "Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image appears" (Benjamin 2003: 475). Thus, the dialectical image is an ambivalent concept, one that is both intuited but also carefully and theoretically, and materially, constructed (Buck-Morss 1995: 220). See also (Osborne 2000: 57–59). For a discussion of the dialectical image in relation to the figure of the angel of history, see (Benjamin 1968b: 257, 263–264).

2 During the abyssal socio-political gap between the years 1921 and 1940, Walter Benjamin writes two quite different accounts of the figure of the angel. The first is filled with enthusiasm and optimism about the theoretical-political correspondences between critical thought and "actuality." The later one is filled with Benjamin's lucid version of what Michael Löwy has called his "revolutionary pessimism" (Löwy 2005: 50) as it was written in the midst of an ascendant National Socialism, the German military expansion throughout Eastern and Western Europe, and genocidal anti-Semitism, and in the wake of Benjamin's dizzying reaction to the blow to the ideals of Soviet communism delivered by the Ribentrop–Molotov agreement of 1939. The two different figures of the angel, their relations to choreographic imaginations, reveal the politics of the dancer in relationship to the ethics of performance in the face of the brutality of (divine) authorial command and the violence of (material) historical forces.

3 Etymologically, an angel is a messenger, from the Greek *angelos*. Moreover, the angel is a "perfect" messenger, one that does not interfere, change, inflect, modify, or warp the message it carries. Michel Serres describes angels as both "perfect messengers" and "delivery people" (Serres and Latour 1995: 119).

4 On the relevance of angelology to a theory of contemporary power, and to an archeology of governance, see (Agamben, Chiesa, and Mandarini 2011, particularly chapter 6).

5 For a discussion of Caffentzis' ideas in relation to affective labor in contemporary capitalism, see also (Clough 2007).

6 Significantly, Wright calls the collusion of classical physics' "linear spacetime" and the "Newtonian laws of motion and gravity" as "Middle-Passage epistemology" (Wright 2015: 14). On the conflation between colonialism and classical physics' linear kineticism see also Paul Carter's extraordinary *The Lie of the Land* (1996: particularly Introduction and chapter 4).

7 Todros Abulafia cited in Scholem (1995: 108). As Peter Osborn writes, Benjamin will "reintroduce explicitly theological motifs into his 'materialist' work, as ciphers or figures for a philosophical consciousness of history that has no equivalent secular form" (2000: 63).

8 The thematics of repetition that precipitate a critical unraveling of expression and intention are also discussed in Heinrich von Kleist's short text "On the Marionette Theater" (1810). Tellingly, the human dancer fails to be graceful because it cannot serve movement neutrally as puppets or animals can. Critical thinking, self-awareness, affectations, and affects—along with the experiencing of historical time—all prevent humans from being perfect dancers. See Chapter 3.

9 For Didi-Huberman, following Gilles Deleuze, singularity "is whatever is irreducible, and therefore, carrier of stangeness [*étrangeté*]." (Didi-Huberman 2013: 82, translation mine).

10 Wright would perhaps see Lemon and Carter's troubling of the stability of spacetime as an example of what she calls "epiphenomenal spacetime," a concept that

enables "a whole inclusive definition" of blackness (2015: 4). Wright proposes that the writings of James Baldwin activate "quantuum multidimensional Blackness" (109). Given the profound influence of Baldwin's writing on Lemon's artistic work, Wright's observations on a physics of blackness are especially illuminating for understanding Lemon's and Carter's choreographic angelology. Significantly for the questions of servility and agency I am pursuing in this chapter, Wright insists that "a multidimensional interpellation of Blackness is also predicated in the assumption that Blackness possesses agency and involves choices" (114).

11 For a narrative see (Arendt 1968: 17–18) and (Fittko in Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999: 946–954).

12 For an extraordinary account of the history of this extraordinary text, see (Löwy 2005).

13 See (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 61–84).

14 On Benjamin and his angel see (Scholem 1995).

15 For a reading of apocalyptic time as constitutive of the present in the work of Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, see (Didi-Huberman 2009: 57–76).

16 The Nobel-Prize-winning physicist Ilya Prigogine makes a similar argument, pointing out that the Newtonian laws of classical physics (or what he calls "deterministic physics") were predicated on a negation of time's arrow: "In deterministic physics, all processes are time-reversible, meaning that they can proceed backward as well as forward through time" (Prigogine and Stengers 1997: 137–138). In other words, classical physics denies history, since in its account of the universe the one-directional passing of time does nothing to the many phenomena it contains, and all bodies behave the same, eternally, as immutable and impervious to the effects of history as the laws that regulate them.

17 Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, containing the universal laws of motion and the basic principles of gravitational law, were first published in 1687. The initial treatise on the laws of bodily motion that contains the first appearance in print of the neologism "choreography" was authored by Raoul Augé-Feuillet and published in France in 1700.

18 "I use the term social choreography to denote a tradition of thinking about social order that derives its ideal from the aesthetic realm and seeks to instill that order directly at the level of the body" (Hewitt 2005: 3).

19 Baroque here refers not only to an aesthetic style that emerged in the historical period that was coincidental with the advent of the new physics of flow developed by Leibniz and Newton, but also expresses any aesthetic style or mode that extends this sensibility beyond its historical delimitation. Gilles Deleuze saw traces of the Baroque even in twentieth-century minimalism, with its use of the continuous line as recent example of the baroque curve expressing visually the linear, undisturbed, unfolding of the parallel lines that define laminar flow. See (Deleuze 1993: 160, note 4). See also (Franko 1993).

20 In Lemon's autobiographical book, *Come Home Charley Patton*, we find three conflicting accounts of the chronology of this first meeting: Under May 2002 we read: "Ninety-five-year-old Mr. Walter Carter [...] is waiting outside a simple brick house" (Lemon 2013: 130); under July 2002, we read that this is "The summer before I met 95-year-old Mr. Walter Carter" (139); and finally in an "Incomplete chronology," the date given for this first meeting is "November 2002" (172). In an email exchange, Lemon told me the correct date was in fact November 2001. And yet, the indetermination expressed in his book recalls what Michelle M. Wright has described as the constitutive multidimensionality of time that is always present in the phenomenology of black experience (Wright 2015: 109–114), and indicates how the disorientation of history discussed in this chapter is not at all a metaphor.

21 Olkowski finds inspiration in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy science, particularly in his Logic of Sensation, which she sees as exemplary of such a science (1999: 274, note 94).

22 "From start to finish, accident and chance [...] will have been *an act or a choice*, a certain type of act or choice. *Chance*, according to Bacon, *is inseparable from a possibility of utilization. It is manipulated chance*, as opposed to conceived or seen probabilities" (Deleuze 2003: 94, emphasis added).

23 For a discussion of Fanon's stumble in regards to a critical mobilization of resistance see (Lepecki 2006: chapter 5).

24 http://www.ovguide.com/video/ralph-lemon-the-efflorescence-of-walter-922ca39ce10036ba0e115ae24860b55f.

25 For a reading of dance, body and archive in relation to Foucault's theories see Chapter 4.

6 Afterthought

Four notes on witnessing performance in the age of neoliberal dis-experience

Note 1: on the demise of the witness

Neoliberal capitalism rises with what German sociologist Gerhard Schulze has called "the experience society" (Schulze 1995). As early as 1972, futurologist Alvin Toffler was already proposing what a decade later economists Morris Holbrook and Elizabeth Hirschman would explicitly advocate: that capitalism must explore "the experiential aspects of consumption" (1982: 132). Investing in the creation and management of experiences, neoliberalism fully embraces its particular understanding of affective performance. It does so by producing, monetizing, and minutely controlling what constitutes "experience," and by generating the semantics and the communicational infrastructure that participants-consumers use to transmit and share those experiences. The monitoring and monetizing of the ways participants-consumers feel, narrate and disseminate their experiences is what constitutes neoliberal *dis-experience*. Symptomatically, its rise coincides with the demise of the figure of the witness that characterizes what Eyal Weizman has recently called "forensic aesthetics." In his diagnosis of a "forensic turn" taking place at the end of the twentieth century, and of a concomitant "forensic aesthetics" resulting from it, Eyal Weizman has recently written that *forensics* has replaced the great "era of the witness" (2012: 5). Indeed, the two terms, forensics and witnessing, are essentially incompatible, and the coming into being of the former is also the cresting and collapsing of the latter. Their intertwined yet divergent histories are illustrated, or expressed, by the very different ways courts of law addressed two high-profile cases pertaining to two Nazi war criminals that had not faced the Nuremberg trials (1945–46): Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele. Weizman suggests that Eichmann's famous trial in the early 1960s represented the epitome of the era of the witness, as the prosecutorial case was based entirely around the testimony of those who had suffered under the bureaucratic extermination machine of the concentration and labor camps he had administered. As for Mengele, who also escaped detention at the end of the war and fled to South America, where he lived undetected until his death under the name of Wolfgang Gerard in the late 1970s, the question before the court was not so much of determining his guilt, but of assessing the

identity of his corpse. It was during this challenging process of identification that witnesses were relegated to the background and forensic experts, scientific discourse, and archeological and anthropological methods, allied with technologies of image processing, forensic medicine, and biochemistry, became the technocratic protagonists before the judicial and police systems. As Thomas Keenan and Weizman write in their book on the advent of a forensic aesthetics, today those scientists, those experts—*even though they never witnessed the crime—are the ones who (expertly) testify about it.* Indeed, it is because such experts are not witnesses that they are considered more capable of testifying about what happened, becoming the (supposedly neutral) voice of inert things (Keenan and Weizman 2012).

Thus the witness "is gradually being supplemented (not to say bypassed) by an emergent *forensic sensibility*, an object-oriented juridical culture immersed in matter and materialities, in code and form, and in the presentation of scientific investigations by experts" (Weizman 2012: 5–6). The aesthetics of this forensic sensibility privilege, indeed, *demand* an affective detachment from the event. It is less an aesthetics than an anaesthetics, in which the capacity to narrate and share the affective impact and intersubjective effects of an event are replaced by the "neutral" or "cold" presentation of scientific data. As Weizman writes, "forensic aesthetics is the mode of appearance of things in forums—the gestures, techniques, and technologies of demonstration; methods of theatricality, narrative, and dramatization; image enhancement and technologies of projection; the creation and demolition of reputation, credibility, and competence" (2012: 10).

In this particular aesthetic regime, it is precisely *because* someone was present at the moment of the event that this someone is considered to be the least qualified person to talk about it. We can see the perversity of this scheme, in which what is deemed unworthy of the event is the experiential capacity to narrate it affectively, to transmit it sensorially, to weave it subjectively into the lives of one's contemporaries but also of future and past generations. Forensics is the end of a certain kind of historical-political performativity of storytelling.

Note 2: on the unmasking of the generalized accomplice

In an essay where "the hour of the crime" and "the temporality of the art work" were fused together as one, Peter Sloterdijk made a cruel and yet absolutely lucid diagnosis of our current globalized predicament of neo-colonial violence: "Ask a modern subject where he was at the moment of the crime, and his answer can only be this one: 'I was there at the crime scene' " (2000: 9, translation mine). However, and this is Sloterdijk's cruelty, this being there at the scene of the crime does not make us all into witnesses capable of testifying about the atrocities of the event, but rather transforms us all into (most often silent) *accomplices*: "Everyone who is touched by the consciousness that he or she, beyond the inevitable quality of witness, is also

integrated, through a kind of complicity, into this new monstrosity [created by humans as modernity], is a modern subject" (2000: 10, translation mine).

In other words, Sloterdijk offers a very different understanding of forensics. It is not the epiphenomenon of the late twentieth-century demise of experience and storytelling as that which the law cannot tolerate, but an onto-historical condition of modernity. This condition has transformed the whole planet into a vast crime scene. In this *scene*, there are only three *roles*: victim (the fallen, the tortured, the disappeared, the enslaved ...); perpetrator (the torturer, the killer, the rapist, the thief ...); and *accomplice* (everyone else, including you and me). Yet despite his harsher assessment, this is just another way of saying that the *witness* has become a weaker figure in our political, juridical, and aesthetic imaginary.

It seems to me that it is precisely for the reasons identified, diagnosed, and described by Weizman and Sloterdijk the figure of the witness must be rescued, urgently. The witness must be given back its performative forces: juridical and political, but also aesthetic. It seems to me that we can find indications of such affirmation of the performative-narrative-aesthetic force of witnessing in some recent artistic propositions, particularly in live performance, and, not surprisingly, in theater and in choreography.

Note 3: for a testimonial audience

Dis-experience has deeply impacted the understanding of what constitutes an audience today. Indeed, the audience hovers between being a consumer and broadcaster of dis-experience on one hand, and being a witness to performance's fugitive singularities. In the first case, the audience is asked to judge and disseminate within pregiven options (likes or dislikes, stars or hearts); in the latter, the audience takes for itself as main task the responsibility of caring for a performance's afterlives, by giving testimony. In an often quoted passage from his essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin describes how capitalist subjectivity has led to the demise of storytelling, which he understands as the necessary historical-affective-political act of transmitting experience: "Was it not noticeable that at the end of the [first world] war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience?" (Benjamin 1969a: 84). Such a "bottomless" (84) decline in the value of experience finds its culmination in advanced informational and warrior capitalism. We can see this in the endemic proliferation of "forensic" devices as instruments of contemporary sociability: instagrammed self(ie)-images, permanently Facebooked snippets of information that, with ever-same poses, coldly disseminate the coordinates of presence. In other words, forensics and its informational-evidentiary protocols represent the absolute triumph of the society of the spectacle in which "separation is perfected" through the proliferations of images (Debord 1994: 11–24). But separation from what? From history, historicity, and the capacity to share experience.

It is no wonder that already in 1936 Benjamin saw that this diminished capacity to share and transmit experience would become an essential element in the development and advancement of capitalism and its (violent and self-violent) forms of subjectivity. Benjamin saw that capitalism would reproduce itself by affirming its grip on subjectivity through the implementation of a totalizing "society of information," where information displaces both "intelligence that comes from afar" and "experience" (Benjamin 1968b: 89). These are the two major components of storytelling, of that powerful affective-performative commitment to constitute an audience that then, thanks to the affective dynamics intrinsic to sharing an experience, does what audiences must: be receptive, embody the experience being told, and retransmit that experience later on, to new audiences.

The audience then becomes itself, not at the moment it witnesses the event, but when it gives to an other its testimony of the event. The audience becomes one only as long as it opts to become an actor-storyteller in the future (near or far). This option is the initiative that defines a political act. In this sense, the audience also fulfills its true aesthetic function. The fundamentally affective-political task of storytelling, its relation to both historicity and futurity, is crucial in the age of "selfies." And, it may be why we have recently seen some important works of live performance that insist on this experiential dimension of the audience, on the audience's capacity to storytell.

In Jérôme Bel's *Cour d'Honneur* (2013), we see the force of this testimonial-experiential storytelling audience. In this piece, made specifically for the iconic main stage of the Festival d'Avignon, the Cour d'Honneur at the Palais des Papes, fourteen audience members of different ages (ranging from 12 to 73 years old), backgrounds, nationalities, and occupations are gathered on the stage to tell the large audience seated before them about their memories of the festival. Their memories, because experiential, because personal, become both profoundly emotional-singular as much as they become also profoundly lucid-social. The performance is a fantastic event in which Bel reaffirms storytelling as a historical-political, therefore truly *dramatic*, force capable of countering the forensic aesthetics of the present. *Cour d'Honneur* reaffirms that one must be at the scene of the event in order to transmit that which, in the event, as event, makes it so: its always elusive singularity, its manifold potentialities, its relational-affective dimensions, its uncontrollable, never neutral, forever precarious *puissance*. *Cour d'Honneur* reminds us, through its simple affirmation of the force of the audience as the one who must give testimony, that it is the subjective-corporeal-affective-historical dimension of witnessing that must be defended today.

We can also find an affirmation of the capacity and necessity to share experiences, an affirmation of the need to transmit, to share narratively, not informational "forensic evidence" but fictive-affective historiographic witnessing, in some recent pieces by Mette Ingvartsen, particularly *Speculations* (2011) and *69 Positions* (2014). In Ingvartsen's recent work, somehow the aggregation of relational potential becomes directly linked to the ways she displays

documents (videos, photographs, letters, books). Ingvartsen displays these documents in ways that immediately transform them into little narrative factories, producing something other than what they "should," since every document is enchanted out of its forensic neutrality by Ingvartsen's words (for a discussion, see Chapter 2). When storytelling is embodied by the dancer and activated by her movements, we see how a transmission of experience can be effectively achieved and the past made flesh right before our eyes, again. Phantasmagoria, or perhaps simply this: in order to connect to history, one must perform the ethical task of becoming available to the reality of the event, always hovering in its essentially doubled temporal structure: to be simultaneously of the past, and of the future.[1] The task of the dancer is to open up the present so that these events gain flesh and muscle, tremors and spasms, gestures and actions, and indeed, words.

The excesses that our affective-experiencing bodies incur as transmitters of experiential memory are what forensic aesthetics cannot tolerate. Indeed, in every testimony, there lies a dangerous threat for the putative neutrality of justice: that the sharing of the horror, the sharing of the atrocity, may crack through language and body, may indeed break the organizing principles of communicative language and corporeal social composure: tears, convulsions, stammerings, repetitions, hallucinations, even collapse. But these are not to be seen as psychopathologies or defects. Rather, as Alexander Weheliye pointedly writes, these are moments when another kind of language reveals the enfleshed alliance between power and its non-verbal inflictions of violence: "to hear Aunt Hester's howls or the Muselmann's repetition merely as pre- or nonlanguage absolves the [juridical] world of Man from any and all responsibility for bearing witness to the flesh" (Weheliye 2014: 127).

Thus, this collapse, both of the flesh and of language, is still a transmission, one that conveys a whole history of the body—this is the "gestural" dimension of storytelling that Benjamin evokes in "The Storyteller." Shoshana Felman writes about the testimonial role of these powerful, corporeal, non-informational excesses in her analysis of a famous moment in the Eichmann trial when a witness, Yehiel De-Nur, fainted on the stand during his testimony. She sees this collapse as not a failure of objective witnessing but rather as a specific mode of giving testimony that exceeds speech. Significantly, De-Nur was a writer, a master of words, with several books published under his pen-name Ka-Tsetnik 135633 on his experience at Auschwitz. By being traversed by that which overcomes our bodies, witnessing realigns the entire social field, and thus historicity itself, gathering around the witness a reconfigured perceptive-aesthetic-political horizon. Because all witnessing (like all storytelling) is about the sharing of experience, it therefore addresses the entire social field as a transitory ear—that later will become transitory mouth: "by the virtue of the fact that the testimony is addressed to others, the witness, from within the solitude of his own stance, is the vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, a stance or a dimension beyond himself" (Felman and Laub 1992: 3). This is how the witness

is never a self, reproducing the spectactorial stance of distance and private introspection. The witness is always thrown beyond that which in the situation would tie him or her down to a self. To witness is to answer the impersonal call of both the event and of those who will have not been there.

Note 4: on the difference between the audience as witness, and the audience as spectator

All of this suggests that a difference must be outlined—indeed is already being outlined in a number of recent live performance works—between the *audience as witness* and the *audience as spectator*. The former embraces and fosters a public that is aware of the political-aesthetic power of sharing experience, and that the transmissibility of experience, of memories, of the narration of events that one has lived through is an imperative in our age when experience is diminished. Conversely, the audience as spectator is the silent accomplice in the crime scene, the one who obeys the cop and opts to remain silent, lest whatever they say is used against them in some future court of law (even if the court and law are implicit ones, symbolic ones, quotidian ones: the courts of social conformity and aesthetic "taste"). The spectator is the one who chooses to check his iPhone or to Google the latest blog on the piece he is presently (non)watching, so to be (forensically) assured of the *facts*. The spectator searches, above all, for *information* for the sake of non-ambiguity. Information thus becomes an anti-witnessing, anti-storytelling, indeed pro-forensic, tool. The spectator does not speak, but Instagrams an image of a moment, mute evidence, which, in order to increase its evidentiary legibility, must be predicated on highly legible, indeed, clichéd, *poses*. Of course, since moments are opaque and the feeling or affective cloud of *any* moment is indeed experiential-linguistic as well as perceptual-political, one has to bury anything that challenges the preformatted rhetorics of the legible pose. There is nothing more self-same than a "selfie." It turns us all into spectators sharing "information" and it turns the planet into a generic scene, a (neutral) background from which more information (or more forensics) can be gathered.

Against this scenario, storytelling and witnessing do something altogether different, as we experience in Ingvartsen's speculative pieces or when listening to the fourteen audience members in Bel's *Cour d'Honneur*. As Benjamin writes,

> It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening.
>
> (Benjamin 1968b: 159)

The scandalous corporeal affirmation of *the experiential dimension of life* is exactly that which forensics removes. The expert, as much as he or she

may want to "give voice to the mute bones of history's atrocities" (Keenan and Weizman 2012: 28) did not witness anything, he or she only transmits information from the remains (traces, marks, refuse, rubble) of violence. Moreover, as "scientific expert" a fiction of neutrality reigns, even if the expert is filled with good intentions regarding the atrocities under judgment. Regardless of how much one wants to philosophically or politically rescue the *spectator* (the audience as viewer, as distant watcher), regardless of how much one wishes to reaffirm and reassure us that the spectator's watching passivity is (always) already "emancipated" (as in Jacques Rancière's well-intentioned but astonishingly ill-conceived reinforcement of a politics of participative-passivity in his arguments in favor of a "paradigm of intellectual emancipation" predicated on his odd affirmation that in *any situation*, including live theatrical performance, "*there are only individuals*"—a sentence that exactly reproduces the neoliberal slogan, famously uttered by Margaret Thatcher in 1987, that there is no such thing as a society, only individuals[2]—who have "the power to translate in their own way what they are looking at," so that "to associate and disassociate" become the "privileged medium" and foundational "principle of an 'emancipation of the Spectator' " [Rancière 2007: 278–279, emphasis added]) *witnessing remains essential*, since it leads to an *active* relation to the future historicity of the event. A relation beyond the figure of the Rancièrian *individual as sensuous private-passive intellect(ual)*, a relation that indeed bypasses individuality altogether, and goes beyond free-associative little games, and becomes trans- and even post-individual. As Shoshana Felman writes, "what is immortal is, in other words, not the narrator but the very story of the repetition, a story that, repeated at least twice, is not simply individual" (Felman 2002: 52). In not being individual, the repetition of a story (its transmission, its translation, its persistent afterlives) beyond personal survival, is singularity: that precipice and swerve that in persisting beyond the self, turns performance into the event it must always become: gathering of pasts and futures in the shared urgency of the collective now.

Notes

1 Gilles Deleuze writes on "the double structure of every event" as simultaneously and essentially split between "the present moment of its actualization, the moment in which the event is embodied in a state of affairs, an individual, a person, the moment we designate by saying '*here*, the moment has come'. [...] But on the other hand, there is the future and the past of the event considered in itself, sidestepping each present, being free of the limitations of a state of affairs, impersonal and pre-individual" (Deleuze 1990: 151).

2 See http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689.

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